ON THE EAVES OF THE WORLD

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THUNDERCROWN AND THE VALLEY OF THE BLACKWATER,
FROM ABOVE "NAIN DZAI" (NAN YÜ CHAI)

ON THE EAVES OF THE WORLD

BY

REGINALD FARRER

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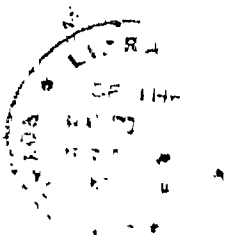
ac.

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME I



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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To

MY DEAR BILL

(W. PURDOM, ESQ.),

THROUGH WHOM ALONE IT WAS THAT THESE ODYSSEYS WERE MADE POSSIBLE AND PLEASANT, THIS TALE OF THEM IS THANKFULLY OFFERED BY HIS AFFECTIONATE FRIEND, THE AUTHOR.

FOREWORD

THE expedition of which these two volumes tell the first half of the tale was definitely planned (though long dreamed of) in 1913, and got going on February 7, 1914. Its object was to explore thoroughly, in the interests of horticulture and forestry, the whole of the Kansu-Tibet Border, from South to North. This remote northerly province of China was chosen first of all in the hope of finding its flora more resistent and useful in the British climate than the softer productions of Yunnan and Szechuan. In the second place the Southern Border provinces have been, and are still being, worked by English horticultural collectors, such as Ward and Forrest, whereas the Kansu March remained a perfectly virgin field. For though Potanin's expeditions traversed the Southern fringes of the province, and Przewalsky's the Northern, these great Russian explorers were concerned merely to get dried specimens of all plants they could in the rapid course of their journeys, in the same way as they sampled the fauna and geology of the districts they traversed. They had no notion of introducing to cultivation the plants they noticed, or of botanically exploring the various ranges round the track of their immediate travel. Moreover many of the

alpine chains up the Tibetan Border remained untrodden even by these constant explorers, and the story of their journeys is not easily accessible to English readers.

Accordingly, in the hope of finding a virgin field, as full of new experiences as of new flowers, I planned my Kansu expedition on a generous scale of time, intending to deal in 1914 with the ranges on the Southern Border, and then, after wintering somewhere midway up the province, to move north in 1915 for a season of exploration in the Alps above Si-ning. This scheme, despite all the difficulties recorded in the following pages, was achieved with perfect success, and with results of a richness that surpassed my utmost hopes. I had the very rare luck of happening on an absolutely perfect friend and helper in Mr. Purdom, formerly of Kew; and he and I, with three untrained Chinese lads from Shansi, made up the whole of the caravan that left Peking on March 5, 1914. Subsequent pages sufficiently explain my course: I will but say succinctly here that these two volumes deal only with my wanderings of 1914, round the extreme South-West March of Kansu, and up the Border, coming to rest for the winter at Lanchow in mid-November. The tale of the second year, 1915, yet remains to be written.

REGINALD FARRER.

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ON THE EAVES OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

THE WEAVING OF THE STRANDS

FATE has her hints for those who keep good watch; and the gates of heart's desire may be found ajar at the most unlikely turns. For many seasons the eyes of my longing had been set far away, beyond the flower-fields of the Dolomites and Alps I love so much, towards the vast incalculable highlands of Tibet; but I could never make for myself any hope of following my ambition, and counted it for nothing that my memory was caught one day by the unusual name of a lovely Primula that dazzled the eyes of the Conference in 1916. Yet Fate was even then at hand in that helping hint. Not a month passed before the same name caught my casual attention again at a lunch-party in the north. "Have you seen Purdom lately?" was the question, and I felt a sudden instinct that here was a lead to be followed up, on pain of that final fruitlessness which always attends on any failure to catch the flying guide-ropes of destiny. I put inquiries, and received rhapsodies; I besought a meeting, and obtained it. Immediately I knew that my instinct had been sound, and that the writing of Fate was now clear and strong before me, unmistakable. Immediately I asked Purdom whether, for no more enticing prospect than his ex-

penses, he would be willing to share and direct a perfect stranger's venture towards the Tibetan March. In a couple of sentences the thing was settled, and the plan was born. Having secured the promise of such a companion, no difficulties after that could be allowed to frustrate the obvious indications of the future.

It is not good that one man should be alone too long amid the huge and splendid oppression of Alps unknown; I would not willingly have faced the prospect for myself, realising too well the weight of lonely awe that sometimes descends upon one even in the compact and well-trodden fastnesses of the European ranges. And the heart of Asia is a strange and haunted land, playing very strange tunes on nervous systems bred for so many thousand years in the different atmospheres of the West. China, sooner or later, bends the solitary European inexorably but placidly to her mysterious will; and, for effective resistance, those who venture far and long into her uttermost territories should be two or three. But with a companion, and a companion so ideal, who had himself borne the test (and as an untried novice, too, in his time) of three years' solitude all across Northern China and down to the fringes of Tibet, there could no longer be cloud or hesitation over the delight of the plan.* There was joy even in the breaking of ties and the arrangement of affairs, and the multitudinous fusses consequent on the glorious revolt of violating all one's duties and domesticities. There was joy, above everything, in the conning of plans and directions.

* Purdom, as lately as 1911, had been collecting in North Central China for Veitch and Sargent. It speaks volumes, alike for his own ardour and the charm of the work, that, on no other inducement than the promise of my company, he was willing at a word to resume it.

The Roof of the World is indeed a suitable and sonorous title, but how few people can make to themselves any notion of what it really means? The Roof of the World is a huge and hideous lifeless waste, some seventeen thousand feet above sea-level, an undulating abomination of desolation pitted with grim little salt lakes over which for ever wails the merciless wind which makes all life impossible. This is Tibet. The Tibet of popular imagination is that deep and fertile valley-trench that lies in a curve immediately behind the sweep of the Himalayas. Here, thickly crowded, is the life of the country, here are the famous Abbeys, and here the Supreme Holinesses of Lhasa and Tashilumpo have their seats. The eastern fringe of that vast high tableland, however, is very much more vague.

Here you have rolling downs, incapable of supporting more life than the nomad caravans passing through, and the roving herds of brigands that prey on the strings of pilgrims hurrying along the sacred roads to Lhasa from Sining or Batang. The country is still a desolation, still the wind-swept barren roof of the world. But now, as you move eastward still, the scene changes, and the eaves of the roof present a quite different aspect. The great rivers of Central Asia are here born, in the golden wilderness of Eastern Tibet, and wear their way down into China between huge mountain ranges that all bear southwards in parallel walls towards the plains of the Flowery Land. It is a country almost incomprehensible in the vastness of its scale and the complexity of its systems. But it is no longer a No-Man's Land. All along the courses of the rivers are scattered frequent and powerful Abbeys, and the country is divided into many petty principalities

nestling amid the mountain chains where the spirits of the air hold their mysterious sway. They are the only powers that do. For perfect lawlessness is the privilege throughout that impregnable wilderness of Alps that composes the whole eastern fringe of Tibet, from where the Mekong and the Salwen in the south make their double rush downwards into Burma, to where the Yellow River in the far north swings on its wild sweep northward from Lanchow into the barren sands of the Ordos.

Look at the official maps. You will find a huge stretch of country gaily and gallantly labelled Szechwan, and attributed to the Chinese Empire. In point of fact, all the western half of that tract is pure Tibet, where the writ of China so little runs current that no Chinaman's life is safe for an hour off the recognised tracks, and the official pilgrim road by Tatsienlu and Litang and Batang to Nagchukka and Lhasa. This country is occupied by countless small independent sovereignties, nominally in the obedience of China, but only so long as that obedience is never exacted; and divided among fragments of old or aboriginal races, now almost indecipherable. And, where there are not these barbarous guerilla chieftainships, there are big Abbeys no less barbarous and of hardly less guerilla habits. Where the sway of China fails, it is useless to look to the authority of the Dalai Lama up among the eastern ranges of Tibet. The Supreme Pontiff's effective authority lies, if anywhere, only in the valley-trench of Lhasa itself; though acknowledged as spiritual overlord throughout the domains of Tibetan Lamaism, his practical hold over the Abbeys of North and East Tibet is of the most shadowy, and the warmest personal recommendation from His Holiness would be of as

little value to the traveller as would a letter from Dr. Clifford or the Bishop of Zanzibar. In point of fact, all up the Tibetan Marches, Princes and Abbots join forces in complete independence, snapping their fingers as complacently at Lhasa on the one hand as at Peking on the other.

Thus, from Tatsienlu northwards to Nan-Ping and on to Labrang there is no safety of travel, and hardly any possibility of travel. Certain tracks can indeed often be traversed (as, for instance, the roads down from Sungpan), but for the real exploration of that serried mass of mountains we must wait for altered circumstances in the Chinese Empire. The Chinese, indeed, already have nearly all they want for themselves. They possess a nominal suzerainty over Lhasa and the Tibetan Marches; the two big roads are kept open to Lhasa, and the Chinese are able, gradually and with their usual slow and patient pervasiveness, to infiltrate themselves, their families and farms, into any fertile oasis or promising nook for cultivation up among the fastnesses of the ranges. True, they are often stamped out in a sudden massacre by the aboriginal tribes, who reward their presence and their contempt with an enthusiastic hatred. But they always by degrees return, often after a bout of impartial shooting and burning by some Chinese regiment or other. The situation is one of intense mutual animosity, enlivened by occasional outbursts of bloodshed. Yet, on the whole, it must be considered satisfactory by all parties concerned. In fact, the Chinese Empire is confronted by much the same problem as had to be faced by Edward I. in Wales, with the difference that the Tibetan Marches are on a scale of hugeness and complexity with which, to say nothing of Wales, not the whole range of the

European Alps, from the Mont Perdu to the Terglou, can sustain any real comparison.

Even nowadays it would take a powerful Empire many seasons of exceedingly difficult and expensive warfare to bring the Tibetan March under any real control. It is not to be wondered at that the Chinese Empire, as unable as unambitious for such wholesale conquest, is inclined to rest content with having, on the whole, all it needs, at the price of occasional assertions of power here and there. The Chinese have no wish to dominate a country so indomitable and profitless. Let them have safe caravan way along certain roads, and a certain amount of safety in settling along their course where crops can be raised or profits accumulated, and they are perfectly satisfied to leave the vast and terrible wilderness of the mountains to the Tibetans and their flocks and herds. They have the name of sovereignty, in fact, but its reality rests on the tacit assumption that it is never to be put in action, and that the two races shall keep rigidly apart, each transacting its own business in its own way on an understanding of mutual forbearance. In fact, it may fairly be said, even in provinces so generally Chinese as Kansu, that where the mountains begin there Chinese interest at once ceases, and the country is no longer China but Tibet.

It will be seen, then, how hopeless of thorough exploration are the Tibetan Marches at present. Neither from Peking nor from Lhasa does any authority there hold good, and it would be too much to expect China to go to the expense of subduing the Marches into complete tameness for the convenience of rare globe-trotters, seeing that her citizens already have as much use out of the country as they want for the present,

trusting as they do for conquest less in the irruptions of the rifle than in their own power of steady, peaceful, and undaunted percolation wherever their needs beckon them. It is true that, during the later years of the Grand Dowager, a genuine and thorough attempt was made by the Manchu Governor, Jao-erh-Fung, to reduce the Tibetan March effectually under Chinese sway, real as well as nominal. His methods were drastic and successful. He dealt faithfully with the Princes, and if within a stated space the big Abbeys did not definitely acknowledge their allegiance to the Dalai Lama (and thus to the Emperor of China, his overlord), he would batter down the walls with his guns, and hew off the holy heads by hundreds.

So that in the short space of his rule there was a terrified peace all up the Marches. But the Grand Dowager died, and not even the tremendous prestige of her name could long avert the overdue doom of the Manchurian line. Jao-erh-Fung, then seated in Cheng-tu, was one of the first victims of reviving China. His troops entertained him to a sumptuous banquet, at the end of which they informed him that, with infinite regret, they now proposed to remove his head. The transaction was immediately accomplished in the garden, with the most perfect dignity and urbanity on the part of all concerned; after which the decollated head was photographed on a dish, and the result sent round throughout the Empire as a postcard, to inculcate on the rest of China the proper way of dealing with Manchu officials. The lesson was efficacious, but among its results was the complete relapse of the March into all its pristine lawlessness. And now, in the vacillations, feebleness, penury, and internal troubles of the various Governments that have since vainly tried to occupy

the Dragon Throne and fill the place of that awe-inspiring old woman whose memory is still the most living force of order up the border of Tibet, the Marches have once again been left to their own sweet will, and are more than ever difficult for the traveller.

These difficulties are manifold. In the first place, it may fairly be claimed that they are most especially daunting for the collector of plants and seeds. The traveller on tour goes his way quickly and once for all through a district, and never stays and rarely returns; therefore with proper provision and escort he may hope to pass rapidly and securely through the most dangerous districts and the most ill-disposed peoples—so long, at least, as he refrains from affronting religious prejudices, and preserves that firm yet genial civility which is so absolutely indispensable in dealing with Tibetans. Far otherwise is it with the botanist. In the first place, it is necessary for him to explore the heights of the great mountains, and this alone is of itself enough to bring the whole country out against him like a hive of furious bees. For does not everybody know that up in the gaunt crags the Powers of the Air have their seat, and that if annoyed by rash or unauthorised visitors they will assuredly manifest their wrath most terribly on guilty and innocent alike, in the form of stone-falls that wreck villages, and hailstorms that destroy the crops and the whole year's hope of subsistence for the bone-poor villagers ?

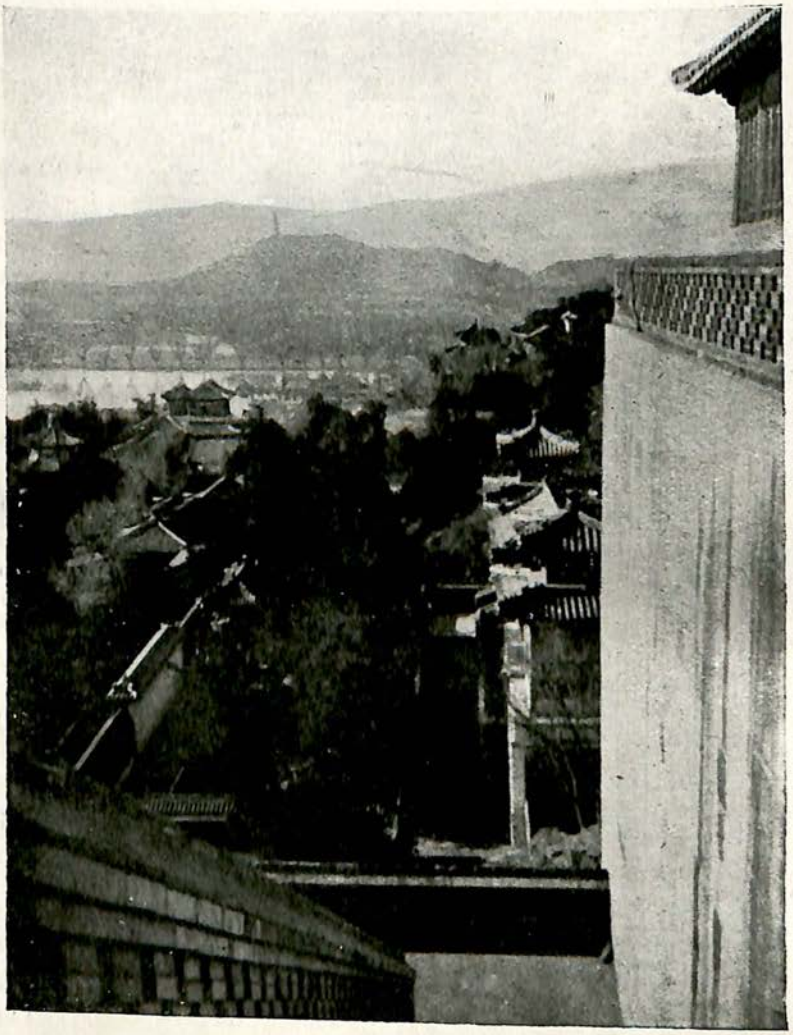
Therefore a very evil eye is cast from the first upon any stranger proposing to explore the high places—whither nobody in their senses, of course, would ever venture, so that his purpose must plainly be nefarious (as indeed is shown by the transparent thinness of his pretences). For whoever heard of anybody going up

into the cold, uncomfortable mountains after anything so profitless as silly weeds that you can neither eat nor weave? The fraud is quite insolent in its barefacedness. This is pre-eminently the view insisted on by the monks, who have reasons of their own for intensifying all the scruples of their parishioners as to invasion of the mountains. For Tibet is probably the richest gold-bearing land in the world, and all its riches are the monopoly of the Church. Now gold is known to be especially a child of the high Alps, and nobody who knows the romantic tales current in our own European ranges about its movements and development, and how it "wachsens" about over the glaciers and its chosen places of deposit, emitting a ghostly glare as it goes, will wonder at the Tibetan monks and peasants having their own kindred superstitions on the matter.

Seeing strangers, accordingly, and strangers bent on going off for days and weeks into the uninhabitable recesses of the topmost crags, the monks know better than to believe they are after anything less lucrative than gold. And where foreigners come seeking gold, are they not soon invariably followed by missionaries and swords and guns, and all the bloodshed and disturbance which is so beautiful a feature in the spread of what is called civilisation by the civilisers? Therefore on all counts the Church sets its very sternest face against errant foreigners in the hills, and calls out every weapon in the ecclesiastical armoury. And this is fatal to the botanist. The single-minded traveller can go straight through on his way without anybody very much objecting, or having any time to make objection felt, but the botanist not only has to explore the lonely heights far above the passes by which authorised traffic comes up and goes down, but he also, having found and

marked his new floral treasures and studied their whole distribution in the district as far as may be done, has then to arrange either to stay in these parts until the seeds are ripe, or else to return and collect them at a later date. The situation, it will be seen, bristles with difficulties. Even the mere hurried journey, snatching at just what you can see by the way, is not always easy; serious and profitable exploration is often impossible. And thus it is, that while such a fine body of valuable work has been achieved in Yunnan for our gardens, the Tibetan Marches up to the Koko-nor, a region so much more promising for English culture, remain so far a blank, except for the little principality of Mupin, only six days from Cheng-tu (and therefore under the awe of China), just off the highway from Tatsienlu to Batang and the road from Tatsienlu north to Sungpan.

Nor do the Chinese authorities entertain any tenderness for such wild-cat ventures. The Chinese hates travelling even on the smoothest of beaten tracks, and calls it "eating bitterness." How much less, then, is he capable of understanding the curious passion that sends an Englishman lairing under rocks on cold wet mountains all among the snow, in order that he may either kill something inedible or collect something unprofitable? It is impossible to read Ford's "Gatherings from Spain" without being again and again struck by the analogies between the Iberian temperament and that of the Chinese. The mules, the inns, a dozen details of the traveller's life in the Peninsula, make one feel once more that one is traversing Honan or Shensi. But in nothing is the resemblance more marked than in the general attitude of both countries towards the searcher after mere knowledge. The notion is wholly incomprehensible: the pretext *must* mask a fraud.



PEKING. FROM THE DRUM TOWER OF THE SUMMER PALACE, LOOKING OVER TO THE JADE FOUNTAIN AND THE WESTERN HILLS

Sane people do not endure discomfort unless for something that is going to turn to solid profit; therefore the Mandarin sits with a polite and patient smile to one's explanations of why one wishes to visit such and such a remote mountain in the heart of a hostile race over whom he has no control. With the utmost politeness he listens to one's tale, and nods and smiles and says he understands: he does not. He only understands that we are talking nonsense to conceal some deeper purpose. He is perfectly convinced, like Darwin's learned Spanish lawyer, that under all this fine tale of science there lurks imprisoned in concealment some cat of ulterior and evidently unavowable design. So doubt battles in his mind with terror on his own account.

For too well the poor man knows that he is between the devil and the deep sea. If he frustrates the purposes of a highly passported foreigner, he foresees that the home authorities in Peking will be stirred up, and that he will get into very hot water. On the other hand, even hotter will be the water, suppose he allows the foreigner's ignorant obstinacy to carry the day and take him off into wild regions beyond effective Chinese control, where he will almost certainly get killed for chipping fragments off some inviolable mountain, or taking a constitutional along some path declared taboo. For, by many a brutal and shameful vengeance, China has at last been taught that even the craziest of foreigners must sedulously be safeguarded in life and limb, on pain of Leases and Places in the Sun being torn from the bleeding Empire on account of some crazy fanatic who has invoked his own death by diligent affronts to Chinese good feeling. The Chinese official knows how the Flag follows the Faith where European nations are concerned.

The Grand Dowager herself, in her *volte-face* after 1900, hammered home the lesson so soundly, even to the uttermost bounds of the Empire, that even beyond the fall of the dynasty the travelling foreigner has been ever since not only as safe as anywhere in Europe, but diligently guarded and escorted and protected wherever he goes, on pain of grievous disasters to any Mandarins who may neglect to serve him. Even to this day you are provided with an escort from each walled city to the next; and, though this escort may consist of no more than a single tatterdemalion armed with a blunt and dinted old cutlass, yet his mere presence sufficiently insures your comfort and welcome, as representing the slow but inevitable weight of the Chinese Empire. Without this escort you *might* fare as well, indeed, but there would be no official responsibility, whereas thus, as things stand, all the officials concerned, from the Viceroys downwards, are liable to the extremest trouble if any mishap befalls a passported foreigner while under their jurisdiction. The plight of the border Mandarins is pitiable, then, when stray Englishmen come along and ask for official guarantees in venturing into wild and perilous lands, supposed to be China, yet perfectly able and determined to go on doing precisely as they please without regard to China or foreigners or anybody else.

Whatever happens, the Mandarin must be the scapegoat. His official honour forbids him to admit that he has no sort of control over the districts and peoples that the traveller proposes to visit, considerations of tact and prudence prevent him from interposing a direct veto, while the very strongest considerations of his career and his head forbid him to let the stranger carry out his plan, except under protection such as he

is utterly unable to supply out of the handful of opium-sodden ragbags armed with rusty Elizabethan match-locks such as in all probability constitute his only bodyguard and garrison. What is the poor man to do among all these reefs? He can only procrastinate and shilly-shally and be diplomatic, in the hope that time may solve the situation somehow or other, or mitigate the traveller's determination, or enlighten him as to the perils of which he is so sublimely ignorant, but which the Mandarin already feels are making his own head sit uneasy on his shoulders.

And meanwhile the Englishman demands a decision, writhes in helpless fury among these polite evasions, curses the insincerity of the Oriental; where, in point of fact, there is nothing but desperate politeness trying hard to safeguard the lives of all concerned, with as little inconvenience and unpleasantness as possible. But none of these considerations make for ease of travel in the Tibetan Marches, and the farther you are from central Chinese authorities, such as the various Vice-regal seats, the greater become the difficulties, and the greater consideration you feel bound to show for the interests of the invariably friendly and obliging local Governor, for whom any disastrous indiscretion or insistence on your part will certainly mean the loss of his office and perhaps of his life. Here, then, are some of the circumstances that encumber the seeker after plants, where larger and more rapid parties of travellers could easily go straight through unscathed, as the armed and amply equipped Russian expeditions were able to do in the north.

So much I say by way of preface, that my readers may have a better notion than I had myself before I started of what it means to attempt the eastern fringes

of Tibet. Maps have such a seductive simpleness of look, so neat and uniform and nicely coloured: how is one to guess the Gargantuan labyrinths of mountain-ranges that are represented by a small faint caterpillar meandering singly across a pink ground; or the evil and hostile hosts that haunt their vastnesses? To say nothing of the fact that all our present maps of Eastern Tibet and far Western China are of the most lamentable inadequacy and incorrectness. However, there is rapture of dreams in even the feeblest map ever made of the land of one's heart's desire; so, before we advance and take the field, I will invite you to open the atlas and con with me the directions in which I plan to take you.

Difficulties, as I have pointed out, insuperable for an unofficial and practically unarmed party of two, debar one from hope of any exhaustive work in Tibetan North Szechwan; and Yunnan and Szechwan themselves have already been so thoroughly pervaded as to leave scant hope of novelties—so much travelled, indeed, have these two provinces been that, to judge from questions, they would seem to be the only portions of China of which the public has any idea. And, after all, if one is going to take the trouble and labour of travelling to Tibet, one is snob enough to wish at least for the credit and reward of going somewhere and getting something that no one else has got before. Therefore we cast our eyes northward to the province of Kansu, and there, along its south-western extremity, descry a very blank-looking piece of map, almost wholly innocent of names, so smooth and bald of appearance that one can hardly believe it to be a tempestuous sea of mountain-ranges. This region is neither Tibet nor China, strictly speaking. It is the Tibetan territory of Amdor, a wild

land of wild peoples, unvisited by travellers of less calibre than Potanin and Przewalsky, each of whom have traversed certain parts of it. Towards Amdor, then, we bend our eyes and our purposes, not only because it offers new ground, but ground so far up in the north that surely all plants from there must reasonably be expected to prove hardy in England—a very important point to a gardener, remembering the soft and tender constitutions that have given us so much disappointment in so many lovely things from the warmer southerly latitudes of Yunnan and Szechwan.

For many days I pondered over large-scale local maps made by Purdom when he visited the edge of the territory, where it merges into the principality of Jo-ni, a region visited also by the Fenwick Owen Expedition in search of big game. Barbed arrows entrancingly led variously westward over its blank pink face, indicating possible routes of exploration—routes, as I now know, quite impossible in reality, unless to a large and fully armed expedition such as the Russian Government alone has provided for the elucidation of Asia; but dreams, none the less, of the most alluring charm. Finally we fixed, for a first point of aim, upon a certain mountain crossed by Beresowsky in the eighties. It is called Chagola, and that was about all we could ascertain to be known of it, except that it was vaguely situated somewhere in the region of a hardly less uncertain town called Kiai-jô, somewhere down in the far southern notch of Kansu. To this remote bourne, accordingly, we bent our preparations for the first season.

Preliminary tales of tents and trappings are apt to be tedious. Suffice it, then, to say that the rest of the year (1913) was spent in agitated ponderings over what must be taken and what might be omitted. For the

guidance of intending travellers, however, I will here say that the only and absolute essentials are a folding camp-bed, with folding table and chairs to match, and a number of sheets of oilcloth for flooring; with these you can immediately establish yourself an island of comfort in surroundings no matter how unpropitious.

The question of armament came next to be considered. Mine was not intended to be a sportsman's expedition, as I dislike the gratuitous killing of my fellow-creatures; and Purdom, though entertaining no such fads on his own account, was very ready to consider my scruples. In fact, he arrived at a most nice balance. Learning that I myself no longer shot, he concluded that I did not want him to do so either, even for the pot; and, accordingly, though he *did* bring a gun, was careful to bring one that would not go off properly, but was always threatening to fly open at the breech and imperil the shooter a great deal more than his mark. At least, so it proved; and this was the reason given. His rifle was a much surer resource of safety, and for the rest we had revolvers, so fatal in use but so impressive in effect, in spite of Bernard Shaw's peculiarly foolish and irritating Lady Cicely.

The mind of a Napoleon is required to weigh up accurately beforehand all that is essential and all that is omissible in a voyage of two seasons; to my own thinking, almost everything is omissible once one makes up one's mind to it, and it is wonderful how simple life can become when resolutely resolved into its bare essentials. In my own case, I find it reduces itself to the materials of washing and the works of Jane Austen; of the two, at extreme need, it would be the washing materials that I should jettison. As for scientific implements such as one considers necessary to the

DETAIL OF THE MARBLE PAGODA AT THE JADE FOUNTAIN

dignity of such an expedition to the Back of Beyond, I believe they are a delusion and a fraud, and in the hands of the ignorant as useful and profitable as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout—and much less so than a fair woman without discretion. Fain would I take plane-tables and theodolites and all the learned apparatus of modern black magic. But even an aneroid is beyond my control at present, and inspires me with nothing but the blankest distrust. So far as I have observed these instruments in action, you twist the face round till the pointer marks the height you think you ought to be at, and then you triumphantly say, "There you are!"

That my conjecture, too, is not so far wide of the truth I gather from the thinly veiled incredulity with which an aneroid's verdicts are received by severe and scientific records. So that, though I purchased one, a large and fat one, to lend credit to the expedition, it was with a private want of confidence that proved to be amply justified. As for the higher flights of science, my expedition could not, anyhow, have been capable of these. After two years of such travel I am convinced that two men, busied on their own job, have no leisure left over for others; when you have collected your plants and pressed your plants and photographed your plants and recorded your plants, you have neither time nor energy remaining to delve into even the most fascinating problems of geography or ethnology. If "exploring parties" are to be as successful and profitable as Mrs. Elton would have wished, they must consist, like the illustrious Russian expeditions, of at least half a dozen men, each one occupied exclusively over his own special work of zoology, botany, geology, and so forth.

And now we are ready for the start, and having successfully survived the precautionary step of getting inoculated against smallpox and enteric, may begin the long Siberian journey. Of this, its beauty, its void lethargy, its sombre and tragic expanses of wintry country, I do not intend to speak: are not these things written in a thousand books already? And this remark suggests to me an obvious difficulty lying in wait for those who set out to write about China. What is one to say, and what is one to leave out? Am I to treat you, dear reader, as one who knows everything about China, or as one who knows nothing, and who, learning I have visited Lanchow, will want to hear if I ran across your Aunt Letitia, engaged on missionary work in Canton? There are so many commonplaces of Chinese travel by now—inevitable paragraphs of which the experienced are quite sick, but which may still convey instruction and amusement to the novice. And, after all, the value of a general travel-book depends almost wholly on its creator's own attitude of mind and personal impressions: one man might flash a light of novelty on Brighton Esplanade, while another might succeed in being dull about the Potălá. The clay, in fact, depends on the potter for its form. Therefore I see nothing for it but to go forward, and tell my own tale as I saw it, begging old hands to remember that much of what is stale to them is new meat to less experienced readers. It would be hard that young enthusiasm should be denied the comedies and hardships of the road in China, because such libraries-ful of previous books also deal copiously with such matters; so, short of telling you that the Chinese frequently wear pigtails, I shall consider no matter of interest beneath your notice, or unworthy of being treated anew.

But what am I to do about the very focus and *raison d'être* of this expedition—namely, the plants it went forth to seek? I am torn between two ambitions. Highly do I aim at giving all the general public a travel-book that it will enjoy to read; but also cannot forget my flowers on my own account, nor the fact that to thousands of my readers they are as vital to these pages as the Prince of Denmark to his play. In fact, I want to write a travel-book that shall also illuminate and satisfy the minds of garden-lovers, and a flower-book that will not lie hard and heavy and indigestible on the mental stomach of the general public. I want to interest the general public without moving the learned to rage, and to gratify the learned without causing the general public to yawn. Accordingly, I have taken my part: to let my flowers play their due rôles, indeed, as they come and where they come (for almost everyone loves flowers), but without emphasis on their rebuffing state-robes of Latin names (all to be found wardrobed in an Appendix). But life is hard when aims are high, and how difficult to sit elegantly on the interstice between two stools! I greatly fear I may often shift too thoroughly over onto one or other, and particularly recommend the chapter headed Satanee to the saltatory powers of all such as do not want to hear *in extenso* about plants.

I will fill up this long stretch across Siberia with yet a few other preliminary cautions as to the methods I want to adopt in giving you my story. For my own part, I have too often found my interest in Asiatic books of travel daunted by a plethora of geographical facts and uncouth irrelevant names that one can neither remember nor pronounce, which give no picture and establish no hold on one's imagination. "Shortly after

leaving Ping Pang Bo we arrived at Kwing Kwang Kwong " is a sentence that strikes no chord of sympathy in my breast, but is too often struck and struck again in the pages of a traveller's records. That this should be so is, of course, inevitable; but even the Ping Pang Bo's of Chinese travel are capable of a livelier colouring and a more definite appeal. All these accumulations of meaningless jargon possess, in point of fact, a meaning and romance of their own; and a city that may be little to you as Hsing-an-fu or Feng-shang-Hsien takes on a wholly different colouring when you realise that the one is the City of the Peaceful West and the other Soaring Phœnix. Accordingly, though with no pretence at rigid consistency, I mean to forge myself the privilege of translating the place-names for you as a rule, giving the Chinese syllables at the bottom of the page in a footnote, and relegating the stricter details of the itinerary to the decent obscurity of an Appendix.

With regard to the Chinese names themselves, whether in footnotes or text, a new difficulty arises, my solution of which will assuredly rouse red rage in the sinologues for whom this book is not intended. Now, by a curious caprice of the human mind, all Chinese words have been carefully romanised as they are not, and never could be, pronounced. The Wade system is quite the finest bad-form joke that has yet been perpetrated on humanity, and the compilations of unintelligible syllables that confront you in books have not even the merit of rightly rendering the sounds they represent. You have to remember that all the letters are put wrong; that *p* is *b* and *k* is *j*, and *j* itself, for some reason more than usually inscrutable, is *r*; and that the luckless children who spend long useless hours learning about the Hoang Ho and the Yang-tze-Kiang are not by any

means thereby getting qualified to find their way to the Hwang Hor and the Yang-dz'Jang.

How are you to get directed to Bow-u-Go when it is officially spelt Poä yü Kou, and how are you to recognise Ba-yĕn-rung in Payenjêng? I do not dispute, indeed, that the European romanisers of Chinese have had an extraordinarily difficult task, owing to the number of half-tones and half-sounds and intermediate letters in which Chinese names abound. But, to my own ear, it seems as if they had invariably chosen the worse alternative, and where a letter oscillates between a *b*-sound and a *p*-sound, never fail to come down firmly on the wrong side of the fence, hammering out a *p* when the sound quite definitely inclines to *b*. These, however, are very high and learned matters, with which I am neither concerned nor qualified to meddle. My own business, though, is to give as clear an impression as I can of the places to which we are going; and I could not feel I was doing this if I let you think of the beauties of the Bei Ling as appertaining to the "Peling" Range. Therefore I propose, without prejudice or any pretence of starting a new heresy, to give you what Chinese names I must in the sound-form under which I and the Chinese alone would recognise them. I will not, indeed, ask you to say Bei Jing for "Peking," nor Kwan Dung for "Canton"; but otherwise I mean to be a law to myself, and save you from such errors as "Chow" for what is more nearly "Jô," with the very faintest hint of a zeta subscript in the middle, imperceptible to any ordinary ear in any ordinary conversation. "Chows" abound, remember, in China, as the final syllables of town names, and meaning invariably walled cities with local Governors; but they are all "Jôs," and I feel I deserve your special gratitude in restoring you

Jâo-jô in place of the unpronounceable Kiao-chau.* At the same time I will give you the official spelling in the footnote, that you may realise what it is, and often meditate on the incalculable methods of romanisers. That my own method will sometimes be inconsistent, I fear, but it may be relied on as being accurate for all the places at least that I myself have heard tell of.

And now the long run is over, and the railway races southwards for Peking. In the blasting brilliance of the March air the wide, flat land lies bare and sere as yet, fading into an infinity of dun-coloured plain, dusky here and there with groups of naked orchards, among which cluster the low grey gables of the farms. It is the East at last, immemorial China, unrolling across the world her endless perspective of little humped graves as far as eye can see, clustered among small dark cypresses, or peppered over the open fields even in the very middle of the culture-patches, in a wasteful and reckless manner which speaks volumes (in a race so severely economical as the Chinese) for the strength of their feeling for the dead. Augurers indicate an auspicious spot for the family gathering of graves, and there the dead are collected from age to age and generation to generation, till the crops are crowded out by the little domes of those who will profit by them no longer. Never must that last lodgment be disturbed, and there is no piety greater than that which replaces some scattered bone that has come to light.

And so our train traverses the monotonous distances,

* Lanchow, again, I leave in its unaltered form, though, of course, the pronunciation is Lan-jô; but the capital of the north, like the northern capital, is a name too famous to be worth altering. However, if you want it translated to a meaning, know it as "Blue-borough."

and at last the gate-towers of the Capital are visible in the distance, and then the sapphire roofs of the Temple of Heaven rising above its dense and sombre forest of cypress; and then the train is under the very Wall, and brought to rest outside the city, close to the Chen Mun Gate, where they have pulled down all the ramp that connected it with the city gate behind, and left the huge fronting tower standing alone and useless, with dreadful German eyebrows of cement plastered above its many windows and broad bastions, like temple-haunting martlets' work on some primeval precipice.

CHAPTER II

FROM PEKING TO THE RAIL-HEAD

FEW of the world's great cities keep their secret so safely as Peking. To many eyes she may only be a waste of emptiness and endless level stretches, but to those who have conquered the mystery of mood she has a stronger charm than any of her rivals. It is not a showy charm. Here is none of the neat loveliness of Kyoto, the polychromatic bustle of Canton, the barbaric contrasts of Holy Moscow, or the irreconcilable dark anger of Constantinople, an Augusta discrowned indeed, and in rags, but indefeasibly Augusta, and waiting in embittered patience for the moment of her restoration. Peking is still imperial, imperial in a high, calm leisure; Peking is still inviolate, unaffected by the rapes and ravages of which she has so often and even so recently been the victim. Her tranquillity is immemorial, and has some touch of sad resignation in it, as of a heart that has suffered much, yet continues on its work. The keynote of Peking is a spaciousness so ample as to seem almost sinister. For miles and miles you may drive through lanes and labyrinths and wide long streets of houses low and grey and gabled, with blank faces, and all so squat and so same that you end by feeling the oppressive mystery of their unseen life.

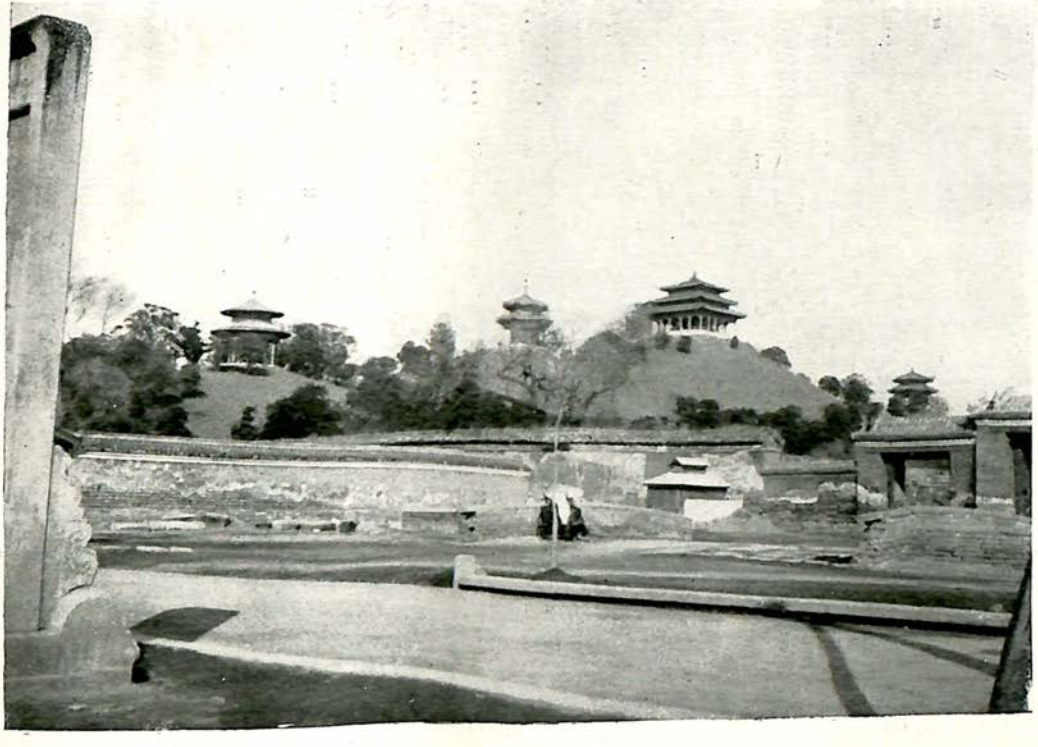
Here and there, indeed, in the foreign quarter, rise huge foreign buildings in the usual uncompromising

hideousness of European architecture in the East; and in the distance rises the tragic pile of the Coal Hill, with its pavilions, and the dead Buddha's Dâgăba on the eminence above the water in the Park of the North Lake Palace. Yet, notwithstanding these rare breaks, the effect of Peking, as you see it from the Wall, is of a limitless flat ocean of grey life, not huddled or crowded, but spread out among gardens in a reserved amplitude all its own. And above this ocean, the centre and soul of the picture, rise the gigantic orange roofs and the vast scarlet walls of the main Imperial Palace, seeming to brood over the city like a long line of sullen golden eagles. In the white haze of a snowy winter's day they loom dim and terrible through the darkness, seeming to impend like a weight of doom. When I came to Peking in 1914 they were gaunt and lonely. Only, in some remote corner, lurked the clipped majesty of the Manchurian Emperor, a salaried ex-sovereign on sufferance; but, desolate and half-abandoned as they were, those tremendous gables of dull yellow were still the masters of the situation, and dominated the whole tranquil sea of city at their feet.

Peking, though the stranger has made good his footing there, still has the power of keeping herself to herself, of living her own untroubled life without taking notice of the foreigner. The city is, indeed, so hermetically sealed in its own cold pride that European innovations here strike less of a jarring note than anywhere else in the East: they are simply not noticed. It is with no feeling of shock that one meets the numerous motors that boom and whistle up and down the wide, smooth streets. This is the essential difference between a parvenu capital and a genuine one: jarring notes and incongruities are glaring upon shoddy backgrounds, but

nothing can affect the personality or damage the essential splendour of a true-born royal city. Frantic crowds of motors and top-hats have by now destroyed the ancient charm of Tokyo, but they are so far powerless against the impregnable pride of Peking and Constantinople. They are freely in evidence, indeed, yet powerless to assert themselves; but Peking is much calmer of mood than her Western rival. No royal city so full of busyness gives such an impression of patience and philosophy. The width of the main streets, the lowness of the houses on either side, may help to account for this by making the throngs of passers-by look small and scattered; but the fact remains that, even in the most crowded moments, one has no feeling of hurry, rush, or throng.

The vast scale of Peking, again, may help in creating this effect, and the broad expanses of flat, brown desert round the Legation Quarter, which make mere emmets of the bustling mortals up and down the long, low line of the streets on either side. But the impression remains constant, and somehow adds to one's sense of the city's secret life as a thing apart. Behind this leisured ease there lies, one feels, a fierce throb of life with which one has no chance of coming into contact; and the blind, grey walls between which one drives so endlessly, seeing nothing of the houses inside, conceal the real Peking from one's inquiry with an iron determination that is only not ominous because it is so bland. The rare foreign buildings, indeed, even in Legation Quarter, where they mostly congregate, merely emphasise their isolation in Peking. Huge strayed palaces from Nice are the Russian and Italian Legations; the German is a collocation of Nuremberg dolls'-houses, and so is the Belgian. But though life and activities flow pulsing



PEKING. "THE TRAGIC PILE OF THE COAL HILL"

in these, more congruous to the general atmosphere is the special hub of our own interests, which nothing ever stirs from its serene and gentle deadness. You pass out of the bustle of Peking immediately into a coppiced wilderness of quiet, from which rise grey bungalows or red-brick pseudo-Georgian villas that give you instantly the feeling of being in some sweet and silent English hamlet far in the depths of the Shires, remote from trains or news, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." And then, behind and above all the flaccid fusses of foreign diplomacy, there rises upon one's imagination the huge marble wall of the Chinese Empire.

Peking, however, is no globe-trotter's town, for, though sights occur in number, they all lurk, and add nothing to the general effect of the scene. You have to go out in search of them; they none of them come out to meet you half-way or lure you in from the high-road. Even the shops, except in certain specified streets consecrated to foreigners, offer blank frontages; the whole city, in fact, is like a typical Oriental face, politely blank as a mask, deliberately inscrutable, and only yielding up its inmost reserves to the pressure of intimacy. Yet there is no town more endlessly prolific of its daily details; each time you walk along the best-known of streets you are liable to meet some wholly new sights, some fresh incomprehensible point of Chinese life.

Now it is a bride being conveyed to her new home in a shuttered sedan of scarlet, bedizened all over with artificial flowers; or, perhaps, if her wealth and quality aim higher, in a similarly caparisoned old brougham, drawn by a shaggy horse, while trumpeters and musicians before and behind accentuate the incongruity. And now it is another aspect of existence: the huge

coffin of scarlet lacquer, with its long scarlet poles and flying trickeries of ribbons and ropes, waiting outside in the street for its fare, in front of some door where an almost life-size paper horse announces that the inmate has ascended on high. Every age meets in Peking, from the immemorial customs of the Han Emperors to the latest thing in cloth caps from Japan. But the European mode is pleasantly little in evidence. Even the Princes of the State drive by in their pristine silks and satins, and those little black skull-caps which are, perhaps, the most inefficient form of headgear ever invented by man, offering not the smallest protection to eyes or nape. Nor have I seen a single case of a Chinese woman who has deserted the comely and sensible fashions of her race for the monstrosity of corsets and high heels; their worst effort in innovation comes, like all their cheap modernities, from Japan, in the form of fluffy bonnets that stand out in a halo of woolly loops and ribbons and bibbons and bows all round the face.

But one must in fairness concede them their right to some protection against the withering icy winds of the Pekingese winter; particularly admirable are the enormous detachable fur collars that completely envelop your whole head and face, barely allowing the tip of the nose to appear. And even over this a handkerchief is often cast, giving a strangely corpse-like effect to the immobile figure going by in a rickshaw. China, in fact, contrasts very wholesomely with Japan in her adherence to her own old ways and costumes. Even the uniforms of the army are adaptations of European style rather than copies, and with even the temporary reappearance of the Dragon Throne there is reason to hope that the evening dress of republican State ceremonial may give way to the voluminous dignities of the Ming Dynasty.

As for the Manchus, of course their styles and costumes are now utterly taboo, and it was a very new thing to see how, on the restoration of the Throne, once more the Manchus and the huge square head-dress of their women (who were as rare as butterflies in autumn under the Republic, visible only in side-alleys, and toddling indoors the moment they met a stranger's eye), the moment that the winter of their discontent was lightened by the summer sun of a returning Empire, dared to emerge once more undaunted into the light of the streets, feeling their own native guise once more to be safe under any Imperial régime, even though not their own.

But Peking by now is the globe-trotter's commonplace, and of making impressions about it there might be no end. I pass by hastily on more special tracks, and have only lingered so long because how dreadful to stay in Peking and find no word to say about it. The reader would indeed have reason to feel choused if one took him to Peking and away again without one syllable of illuminating comment. (I may, perhaps, say more, if a later moment allows, when I return.) In point of fact, though, if one is preparing for so long a flight as mine, for two whole seasons in the wilderness, one has little leisure for sight-seeing, and little spare energy of soul for absorbing pictures and engendering profitable reflections. Packing and contriving fill all one's time, and my fortnight in the capital went by like a flash. But at length everything was complete, the horses bought, the staff filled up, with one important exception, and all was ready for the start.*

* I should here say that Purdom had gone on ahead of me to Peking to get things in train against my arrival. Lest repetitions prove tedious, let me here once and for all declare that no amount of them could ever do justice to my companion's untiring energy and unclouded good-cheeriness, or ever repay a fraction of the debt I

That one exception was the cook. Let me explain that, while trained Chinese "boys" and cooks are, perhaps, the best in the world, these are perfectly hopeless on any such expedition as mine. They are the products of elaborate civilisation in the coastal provinces, a delicate and refined race, with more than the average Chinese abhorrence for all forms of roughing it. For the services expected of them they are admirable; but even if you could induce a foreign-trained servant to go with you up-country, you would be most fatally advised if you did so, as he would assuredly break down at the first danger or difficulty, collapse beneath the miseries of cooking with inadequate pots, or sleeping on inadequate beds, or messing with what his lily-handed elegance would regard as dirty coolies—social grades and etiquette in China being as rigidly defined as at the Court of Austria.

You have, then, to resign all hopes of getting trained and English-speaking servants; they will not go with you in the first place, and they would be quite useless to your purposes if they did. You might as well expect efficient aid from a spoiled and fractious French maid through the mountains of Albania. What you want is a very different article: some quite rough diamond, without social position or social niceties, a man ready of hand and speech, capable of coping with all the

should always feel to owe him—were we not gone beyond such considerations, he and I—for the endless kindlinesses he did me throughout, "without money and without price." It is not so invariably that two men, picked at haphazard for long intimacy in rough and perilous travel, have so pleasant a tale to tell, or emerge from the test yet better friends than they went in. I take especial pleasure, therefore, in here saying this, clearly, plainly, and finally: If ever a traveller was luckier than I in his friend, I've never yet heard it, and don't believe it.

difficulties of camp and road—wild life, wild peoples, wild fare. This we were fortunate enough to find in a former servant of Purdom's; accustomed, therefore, to rough-and-ready travelling in insecure places. The Mafu proved, indeed, our stay and stand-by, a man of many qualities and of their many defects. His very appearance was enough to daunt the most hostile village; for he was of a hideousness rare and special among men. Imagine a bandy-legged rhomboidal gorilla, gap-toothed and rubicund, capable of blossoming into a demoniac fury of yells and leaps and howls that might well affright a fiend. I have certainly never in my life seen anything so ugly.

At least, so I thought, until his younger brother was introduced to bow before his new employer. From that moment I vacillated uneasily all the time as to which deserved the palm of absolute ugliness. But the Mafu, on the whole, has it; for his grim and rugged features had so peculiar a grotesqueness of their own, such a supersimian light of intelligence, as raised him to the rank of an almost ornamental gargoyle, or one of those fantastic freaks of frightfulness that silly people buy at Harrod's and put on the mantelpiece, and call a gazeka or a gollywog or a billykin. No such pre-eminence marked the more pedestrian plainness of the Go-go. The name describes him absolutely, though only in origin a misrendering of Mafu's introduction—Waw-di Ger-Ger (my brother). He *could*, in fact, be nothing else *but* the Go-go—a good, simple creature, indefatigably serviceable, but almost paralysed with terror at the sight of the first Europeans on whom he had ever set eyes. Fresh from his Shansi village and from his daily task of jogging along on a mule half asleep from one farm to the next, the Go-go viewed

everything in Peking with great bulbous eyes fairly plopping from their sockets; his lower lip hung out like a bookshelf in unresting surprise, and his prognathous foolish face was perpetually in a state of olive-green perspiration.

These, then, were the two pillars of the expedition: Mafu for general direction, and Go-go for general service and such niceties as the handing of dishes. But for dishes to be handed successfully there should be something on them; the problem of providing this proved impossible of solution in Peking. The slim and elegant little people who there abound would by no means suit our rough purposes, and after various abortive interviews we fell back on the Mafu's knowledge of a friend down the line who might, perhaps, join our party and manage, at all events, elementary cooking. This was good news—not only in the matter of the cook, but also that, being provided by the Mafu, he would be under the Mafu's authority, and the Mafu consequently responsible for his good behaviour, on pain of himself losing "face." The hope proved in this case delusive; but the system is a very valuable one in China, and accounted for the selection of the Go-go. In China there is, in every department of life and government, a most elaborate chain of responsibility from lowest to highest; in the household the eldest brother or head servant is lord over his juniors, and responsible to his employers for them or for any other underling whom he may engage. With such a central point of authority the harmony and order of your household is complete; without it you are at the mercy of intestine warfare among the staff. The cook, however, was still a dark horse; our highest hope in his regard was that he might dawn upon us at that vague station "down the line."

His proficiency in cooking and the arts of travel rested only on the Mafu's guarantee. With this, for the moment, we were glad to rest content, and in due time the day of departure did at last arrive.

Those who hunt for omens would have found ill-augury for our expedition, starting off, as it did, for the wild inland provinces where already we heard of the White Wolf armies of brigands dimly raging. For it was dark and raining on the day of our departure, and darkly, dismally did it rain throughout the long dull journey down across the flat distances of Chih-li. There was nothing to hold the attention, and the two sumptuous and civil old Mandarins who shared the compartment and were so interested in our Chinese passports (fresh from the Chinese Foreign Office and like young tablecloths) held it even excessively with their incessant hawkings and spittings, in accordance with due Chinese custom, which at first one finds so repulsive and ends by never noticing. The landscape offered nothing but a level weeping monotony of brown and ochre, over which, in the sweet influences of the rain, was already showing the first fine faint film of green, more visible now for the darkness of the day. Occasionally a sad old pagoda loomed up and passed, emerging like a grey ghost from the coppice round its feet; occasionally a walled city would slide by and vanish again into the murk; but pagodas and walled cities seemed each a repetition of the last, the recurring creation of a tedious dream. And the rain streamed pitilessly past, until one shivered for the misery of the two wretched ponies, shut up behind the engine in an open truck, after many difficulties made on the point by the smaller of the two, a pot-bellied little round porpoise all covered, on a ground of creamy white, with

what looked like countless splashes of tar in various degrees of fresh black intensity. Long and intimate was to be our acquaintance with Spotted Fat. He was either one-eyed to start with, or got blinded with a cinder on this very journey; he was endowed with painfully susceptible nerves, a shocking temper, and strong views on copying the tortoise of fable; so that by this pony many evil things afterwards befell. His comrade, tall and white, with a long meek Roman nose, was of quite a different character, willing and active; I like to think of him now enjoying a lifelong reward of virtue in the hayfields of Tibet.

In due course the monotony of the journey was broken by the due appearance of the cook, a very elegant and puss-faced small person, the strongest possible contrast to his fellow-workers. He made obeisance with smiles; I marvelled anew over the ways of a land where a man will thus leave his whole circumstances at a moment's notice, to join a perfect stranger for a two years' trip into the dangerous wilderness of the West, without any guarantee or reference, and without even any stipulated wage. What he is to get, too, will only be paid him at the end of his engagement, and lies at the mercy of his employer's discretion and his own good behaviour. Of this that cook made proof: the tale of his iniquities will gradually unfold. Suffice it here to say that neither could he cook, nor did he ever make the smallest effort to acquire that useful art.

Long was the journey, and uncertain are the times and seasons on Chinese railways. Indeed, the Hibernian characteristics of contrivance and substitution which are everywhere so remarkable in China are nowhere

more so than their conduct of trains and lines.* Iron is a useful article, and nothing long retains its pristine use in China if capable of being turned to more immediately profitable ends. The cleaning-rods of the army come in much handier for pokers and skewers; the nuts and bolts of the permanent way, the screws and studs of the engine, are clearly indicated for sale and traffic. Out they come, then, drawn by the strong magnet of cupidity; and some harmless trumpery is substituted in the necessary places. Yet still the machines continue to be serenely run without disaster; a Chinese will continue quite successfully to manage an engine or mechanism of any kind long after its parts are fairly worn out or divided up among his friends for a consideration. And where a European would probably attain only to immediate and crashing catastrophes, the Chinese goes along in calm jog-trot prosperity. It is only an illuminating exaggeration to say that he is never so happy or so efficient as when he is conducting the thousandth journey of an old engine whose boiler is patched with stamp-paper and the wheels tied on with tape. He is, indeed, the supreme handy-man of the world, and can make the vilest trash do yeoman service to the most important ends.

So the train lumbers deliberately on, and takes no account of minutes and hours lost on its time-schedule. It was black night long since before we came to the bridge across the Yellow River. It is not too much to say that this is the most important strategic point of the Empire; the fact impresses itself upon you plainly

* Talking of resemblances, I must here recur again to Ford and how wonderfully Spanish character coincides in many respects with Chinese—notably in inn-habits, mule-traffic, and the cults of pork, garlic, and inexhaustible mañana.

and indelibly when you see that one thin thread spanning a waste of turbulent mud-coloured water, and realise that this is the sole link that binds Northern and Southern China. One thinks of the waist of a wasp as one understands how the least flaw at this point, the breaking of one span, would cut off the South from the North, and divide the Empire into the two kingdoms that some of its inhabitants desire. Slowly, nervously, with clanks and bumps and thumps, the train crawls out upon the rickety tightrope of the bridge. It is the most unadorned of bridges, a mere skeleton, consisting of nothing but the bare essentials; and seems, accordingly, a great deal more incomplete and perilous than it really is. In point of fact, it is a quite adequate piece of work. Indeed, it has to be; not otherwise could its countless piers, deep-sunk in the unfathomable mud of the Yellow River's bed, resist for half a day the insatiable fury of the water.

The Hwang Hor is very different here from what we shall one day see of it at Lanchow. But, whether it be broad or narrow, it is always a river that impresses one with a sense of incomparable force and malignity. The Yangdze Jang has a leonine magnificence of temper, intense and splendid, sometimes inspired with an appalling concentration of fury, but sometimes in a blander mood, and capable often of generosities. But his twin-brother, the Hwang Hor, is merciless and unresting as a tiger; well may he be called China's Sorrow, for it is not easy to fancy him sparing life or province. How should it not be so, if environment has any influence on character? The two greatest rivers of Asia are born almost within sight of each other up in the frozen rims of Tibet, but within a little their divergence of direction becomes as violent as their

difference of nature. A straightforward torrent, the Yangdze roars into Szechwan, is abruptly checked into obedience and diverted and shown the way he should go by the uncompromising mountains of the Likiang range; and thence in a huge curve sweeps violently away down through Central China to the sea, environed all the way by the soft and silken atmosphere of Szechwan and Hupeh, and their steamy, dreamy, comfortable lands of palm and bamboo and orange.

Very different is the choice of the Hwang Hor, which, on leaving Lanchow, makes as violent a swing far into the north as that of the Yangdze to the south, seeking the grim austerities of the frozen Ordos deserts. These he must find sympathetic. To their bitter inhospitality his own temper naturally gravitates, and from their ungenial desolations he draws confirmation of his own unfriendliness to man. Unlike the tamed and genial Yangdze, the Hwang Hor only here and there allows himself to be used for traffic, but remains on the whole a useless, unharnessable force at the best, and at the worst a demon of destruction, incalculable in direction and uncontrollable in his voluminous malignance. So, finally, he bends again to the south, and makes his way to the sea. And what esteem can you have for the character of a river so insatiably greedy of destruction that he will not even keep to his own chosen bed, but must divagate into new courses, for no other end than to ravage fresh territories and add a few more millions to the tale of his victims?

Where the bridge crosses him the Hwang Hor is furious and spiteful as ever, surging round the base of the piers as if with so many angry hands seeking to pluck them away, a waste of dirty water of incomparable breadth and impressiveness as you look down upon the

tumbled ochre sea while the train cautiously clanks across the frail-seeming naked skeleton of the bridge. But now our destination approaches, and in a little while we shall be done with the railway, not to see one again till we return after two years from the Back of Beyond. Under the cleared cold sky of sparkling stars we disembark in the dawn, snatch a few hours of uneasy sleep in a black inn, and are off in the early morning for Honan and the rail-head. The world was all aburst after the wet of the day before, and in the sunlight the young green of the willows was almost incredible over the viridian stretches of the crops, here much more advanced on this sixth of March than on the frozen northerly plains of Peking. Ragged low ranges of soft blue hill occupied the distance, and we traversed a strange territory of deeply and regularly terraced loess, forming winding flat ravines and narrow gullies, filled with trees and charming mud farms, seeming like very growths of the ground itself, nestling into their little ghylls or cropping out from the straight walls of the cleavages, cool in summer and sheltered in winter under their slabbed terraces and cliffs, from which hang small and scrubby cypresses. Then, after this, a flat open land of many graves, a river, towers, pagodas, and the city of Honan.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAIL BEGINS

A BIG railway line is proposed to link up Central China with the Peking-Shanghai line, which at present is still the only considerable railway in the Empire running down near its coast, and thus leaving all the inland provinces without any but their immemorial tracks by way of communications, unless you except the short line from Peking to Kalgan and a French one from Hanoi up to Yunnan-fu. At present, however, though large and stately schemes exist, their lines are still laid in air; and in the present state of Europe and of the Chinese Empire it is hard to imagine when such schemes will be able to materialise.* From Honan to Sian-fu the line was definitely promised, and the tracks are even laid for it for some two or three days' journey, and the rest of the distance duly surveyed; but all the European engineers are scattered now to their several countries, and everybody in Europe has to-day got ample use for any pence he may still possess, without casting his bread upon the waters of China. So that the growth of the railway is but problematical, and already the Chinese have discovered the merits of its well-beaten ramps and embankments as a highroad for traffic of every kind.

* A new American loan is to do the job.

In our time the train ran as far as Mien-Chi Hsien,* but only on a temporary track alongside of what was to be the permanent one. These trains, too, were not officially open for traffic, so I draw a veil over the many troubles we endured in endeavouring to secure a passage, and the seething hordes of coolies through which we had to battle our way to make it good. At last we did so, and the journey began. I was glad when it ended, for the train lurched and bumped and staggered to and fro like a drunken man along the impermanent way. However, the country hereabouts is dull, and one is thankful for two or three hours of railway journey, no matter how agitated, that save one two whole days of such tracking. At Mien-Chi Hsien, then, the caravan alighted, and was claimed with a white flag by the friend of the Honan innkeeper; for in the more populous parts of China there is a most reassuring method of thus passing you on from inn to inn. At all the stations and stoppages the agents of the various hostelries stand aligned, each waving a white flag with the black name-characters of his house painted on it; and every innkeeper all along the road is directly and personally responsible for the safety of you and your servants and all your goods and chattels by the very fact of your choosing his establishment to stay in. Accordingly, we were swept away towards the town, which lies a few hundred yards from the present station. It is a typical Hsien, or walled city of the lower class, not competing with a Jô, and still less with a Fu—a rather desolate and rotting little town in the desolate grey and ochre tones of the loess.

A very muddy main street forms its chief feature,

* By the end of 1914 it had got as far as our first stage, at Our Lady's Hall (Kwan-yin-tang).

and the gate-towers are in a sad state of decrepitude, with beams collapsing and weeds waving among the broken ridges, whence most of the tiles have fallen. This picture will serve for many along the road, even as an impression of one Jô will suffice for many, and that of one prosperous Fu, all these Chinese ganglions of life being planned, as far as the land allows, on one unvarying principle. A square of four battlemented walls, broad enough on their ramp to run two motors abreast, encloses the city. At the four quarters in the middle of each wall-face rise the gates, surmounted by many-tiered towers that are the sole features of the place, and signs from afar of its presence. From gate to gate run two main streets, intersecting in the middle, and here ends the deliberate plan of the town, which now develops a labyrinth of little lanes and winding blind alleys among blank-visaged walls that hardly allow a hint of tree or shallow gable behind, or, now and then, of the more costly tiled roof of some temple. A featureless greyness is the note of all these smaller Hsiens, whether they closely fill their enclosure of walls, like so many, or sprawl loosely out amid wastes and orchards like Min-jô. In the main streets, indeed, are the shops and a buzz of life, but nothing can give an impression of colour, gaiety, or *joie de vivre* to these pale old cities of Northern China and the loesslands.

This mysterious word is, I believe, the invention of Baron Richthofen, and as it will recur frequently, it is essential that I should now give you some notion of what it means and involves. It is well known to the "merest schoolboy" of Macaulayese tradition that the centre of Asia is one sandy lifeless wilderness of incomparable size and age. Now, from the very beginning of such a state of affairs it has been the habit of the great

deserts, no less susceptible to the influences of spring than are primroses and the vocal turtle, to become restless and excitable in the opening months of the year; they rise up and take the air, accordingly, in dust-storms that are the terror of life even in Peking, filling all the world with a cimmerian darkness of midnight at noonday, compared with which the densest of London fogs is but a gentle haze. Nor do our fogs leave behind them a many-inch sediment of dust that penetrates everything, and laughs like love at bolts and bars and shutters. This driven silt is said to be the ultimate secret of the loess. For many millions of years beyond all mortal reckoning the deserts have blown and floated and drifted across the face of Eastern Asia, not only in their periodical storms and "wander-monaten," but all through the year, when the winds ruffle their loose faces. And this silt of theirs, in the passing of æons, has settled down over all the face of Northern China in an accumulated layer of compressed dust now many hundreds or even thousands of feet in depth (though varying, of course, in different districts). It is not too much to say that all over Shensi, Shansi, Chih-li, and Honan, and far away into the wilds of Western Kansu and Tibet, the loess now forms the lower ranges of the hills and all the plains and cultivable levels. In effect, it is of a dusty ochre colour, a hard thick substance like dried mud; its colouring spreads desolation over the land, and its lines are dull and monotonous. Not always, though, for it has strange laws of cleavage, and loves to gape into deep straight-sided gaps and gullies, traps for the unwary and a sore nuisance to the traveller, but which, nevertheless, have a picturesqueness of their own, of straight castellated wall rising over castellated wall till the flat planes of those

faces are like some painted stage-setting, and make the little human figures, winding their way in and out up behind among them so inexplicably, have the look of marionettes ascending among what Mr. Yates would describe as "scenes in flat."

This displeasing formation finds more favour in the eyes of the peasant than in that of the horticultural zealot. For it may be taken as a rule that, where loess is the staple, you will find no wild plant of the smallest interest. The rule has its exceptions, indeed, and the golden poppyworts flaunt bravely in spring along all the loess cliffs of Northern China and the loess parapets of Sian; but the loess does not ascend to the levels where alone the Alpine flora can be expected, and its own nature, beside being perfectly unfriendly to flower and shrub, is so adaptable to culture that loesslands may be taken as synonymous with cultivated lands. Every inch of it, indeed, is tilled to its uttermost possibility; it may be called the staff of life to the Northern Chinese, and even were hill-trees and shrubs willing to clothe the slopes of its downs, the peasants would not suffer them to do so, in their anxiety to get the fullest possibilities of livelihood from every portion of their ground. With the result that the bared hills, terraced up for millet and grain, offer naked flanks to the summer rains, and are gashed and torn on every side in cruel ravines like wounds, tumultuous and ghastly, by which the torrents spout themselves furiously away without doing any good to anybody. To the traveller the loess is an unmitigated nuisance. As Mrs. Elton has so justly said, "in summer there is dust and in winter there is dirt." She did not, indeed, state the case with sufficient vigour. In the summer the loess blows across your path in a cloud of suffocating dust that infiltrates

every portion of your clothing and person; but in rain its tracks become deep pools and sloughs of unnegotiable liquid mud, in which mules and men get bogged for hours. In drying, too, this agreeable compound congeals to a slimy mess like greased ice, along which one can only waddle slowly like a lamed duck, thankful for each slow successive step that leaves you still tottering on your feet. In the glairy birdlime of it not even practised mules and bearers can always keep their foothold, and to the flowerless monotony of the loess, its sure promise of dulness alike in landscape and botanical result, is added the disadvantage of all the impediments it offers to travel.

On the other hand, it does give certain materials for gratitude, not only to the peasant, but also to the wayfarer. To the peasant, indeed, it comes in most handy, not merely as offering many miles of tillage, but even as giving him a house always ready to his hand; for the composition of loess is just what the builder and plasterer require: a little water, a little chopped straw, and a few barrow-loads of loess from the nearest bank or cliff, and there you have immediately a composition unsurpassable for house-building. It hardens clean and dry and indestructible, of a cheerful smooth ochre that gives a delightful impression of cleanness; it wears indefinitely, and when your old house at last gives out you do not bother about expensive repairs, but merely run up a new one close by on the same lines without a farthing of expense. There are whole tracts of South Kansu, for instance, where the inns along the road and all the villages are always of a new-pin neatness and smart tidiness that delights the traveller afresh every evening, thanks to the way in which their inhabitants take advantage of the loess on which they

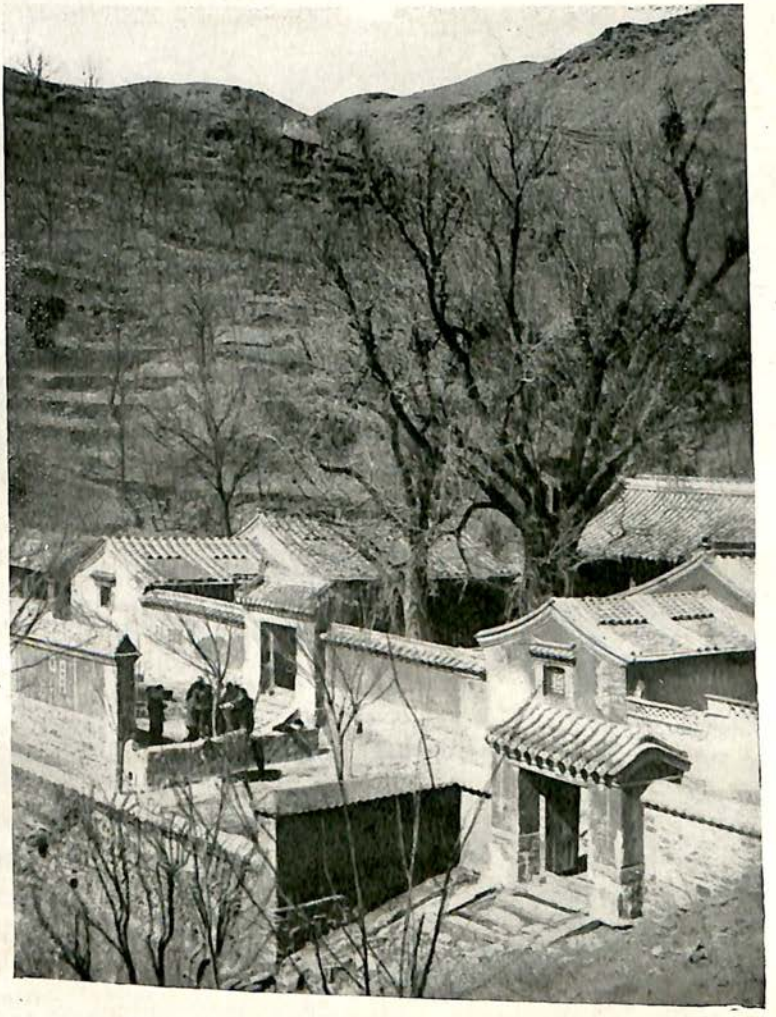
live. One might say, too, *in* which they live; for not only does the loess provide them houses to their hand, but also with houses not made with hands. In the loess countries, indeed, the ordinary farms and villages peppered across the wide expanses have all the air of being natural growths from the soil on which they stand, and from whose colour they do not vary; but where the loess has rolled itself up in downs and dells it gives yet another convenience, for its cleavages tend to fall away in short straight-sided walls, as smooth as if planed off, while within it is often phthisical with cavities. Accordingly, all along each terrace you see the sheer falls pocked with dark doors, and very often a whole population lives troglodytically, almost unguessed at, either in the natural grottoes of the mud cliff or in habitations artfully scooped in its recesses.

No wonder that North China of the Chinese means practically the loess country and the loess country alone, the grasslands of the North and West being abandoned contemptuously to Mongolia and Tibet; but the horticulturally minded traveller finds the culture a nuisance to his schemes, and the loess in general as unpleasant an invention of Nature as all other travellers are forced to consider it. I am glad to have now done with its description, and will only add that, except in the mountain ranges and higher hills, it may be taken as the universal surface of all Northern China—at least, as far towards the heart of Asia as the Koko-nor. Southwards it cannot penetrate, thanks to the long barrier of the Tsin-Ling, which stretches across South Shensi, and is the one important Chinese range that is really in China, not bordering on Tibet, but isolated in the very centre of the Empire. The Tsin-Ling, then, effectually cuts off the southern provinces from the

circumstances of the northern. The desert dust can fly no farther, and on the southern edge of Kansu you gradually leave the loesslands behind for ever, and enter on the lush rich loam of the Red Basin of Szechwan.

At Mien chih Hsien we bade, I say, our last good-bye to the railway, and were to embark on the long trail; here, too, we met our first difficulties and our first Chinese inn. It was a very favourable specimen, not untouched by foreign influence, evident in the white wall-paper of its rooms and their occasional panes of glass. But it affords me a favourable opportunity to deal faithfully, once and for all, with the notorious hardships of Chinese travel, to which I shall then not have to recur unless in circumstances of especial horror. Before I left England, many were the strong men with whom I conversed, and many the books of the wise and learned in Asiatic exploration that I consulted. One and all they threatened me with the direst distresses and discomforts by the way that the mind of man could conceive, until I figured the life of a wanderer in China as one incessant purgatory of stinks and vermin, in the course of which one was very fortunate if one did not have to lair nightly on a dunghill with pigs for company and the tears of heaven descending through the gaping roof in a shower of bugs and scorpions.

Can it be that travellers are not averse from assuming an heroic attitude in their books and tales? Or was it that by sheer contrast with what I had been warned to expect I found the reality so agreeable a disappointment? Certainly, much as I should like to do so (and appear thereby the more picturesque and enduring), I cannot confess to having found any horrors at all in Chinese travel; it is a life, in fact, that even a sensible woman could lead. The essential point, of course, is



A LITTLE CHAPEL-COURT IN THE WESTERN HILLS

to realise from the very outset that you are leaving behind every single item of the comforts you have known all your days. If this is firmly laid hold of, you will find at once that what is not expected is not mourned; and I am tempted to believe that only those heroes who cannot detach their thoughts from white enamel troughfuls of hot water morning and evening; who, like heroes of female novels, always don "immaculate" evening dress to take their dinner, and must have their regular shaving-water and their valetings and their perfectly mahoganised boots each morning—that only these excessively fine flowers of European civilisation can fairly find horror in the elemental simplicity of Chinese travel. If you make up your mind definitely that you are going to be a primitive barbarian for the term of your trip, that bare nourishment, rag-bag clothes, and a bristling chin are to have no terrors for you, you will be as happy as the day is long, if your nature can face the prospect. And I am thankful to think that deep down in most of us the primitive mudpie-maker still lingers; that even squalor has the charm of emancipation for many of us who do not find that the indispensable crown of life consists in a stiff and speckless glossy collar every morning.

Cast aside all the lumber, then, and face outwards towards the huge simplicities: life on the road in China will hold for you none but the legitimate hardships of weariness and hunger. We spend our days trying to invent how much frippery we can add to the complicated burden of existence; when you attempt the contrary process, you find that elimination proceeds with such vertiginous ease that at last it is almost in a delirium of delight that you cast aside nearly everything you have ever thought necessary, and read that

common word in a wholly new light. It is at least arguable that you are never so free as when you have jettisoned the links and collars of civilisation.

I speak, of course, only for Northern China. The loesslands are wide and spacious, cold and clean; the conditions of life are to match; the population is scattered leisurely across the country, and you get nowhere anything like the dense and crowded complications of the warmer, wetter South. The climate and the loess combine to keep existence sweet and wholesome; the mud inns are bare but decent; the wide sweeps of the landscape present no such sanitary problems as are so evident and oppressive in Szechwan; the air is pure and dry and cool, racy with the breath of the deserts in the north and the germ-blasting cold that breathes down from the Roof of the World. In South China you get a weeping, steamy climate, the close atmosphere of a hothouse, a population piled up upon itself in the towns and serried through the country. Here, then, where the inns have to be of other materials than the hard-cut loess, you often have to travel in a persistent atmosphere of liquid manure, filth, and vermin. This *may* be so in general, and is certainly so in places; but I can say little of Southern China, and confine myself to the essential point of my own knowledge, that in the northern provinces no reasonably sensible and properly provided person of either sex need be in the least afraid that travel will confront him or her with any horrors and hardships beyond the powers of philosophy to surmount.

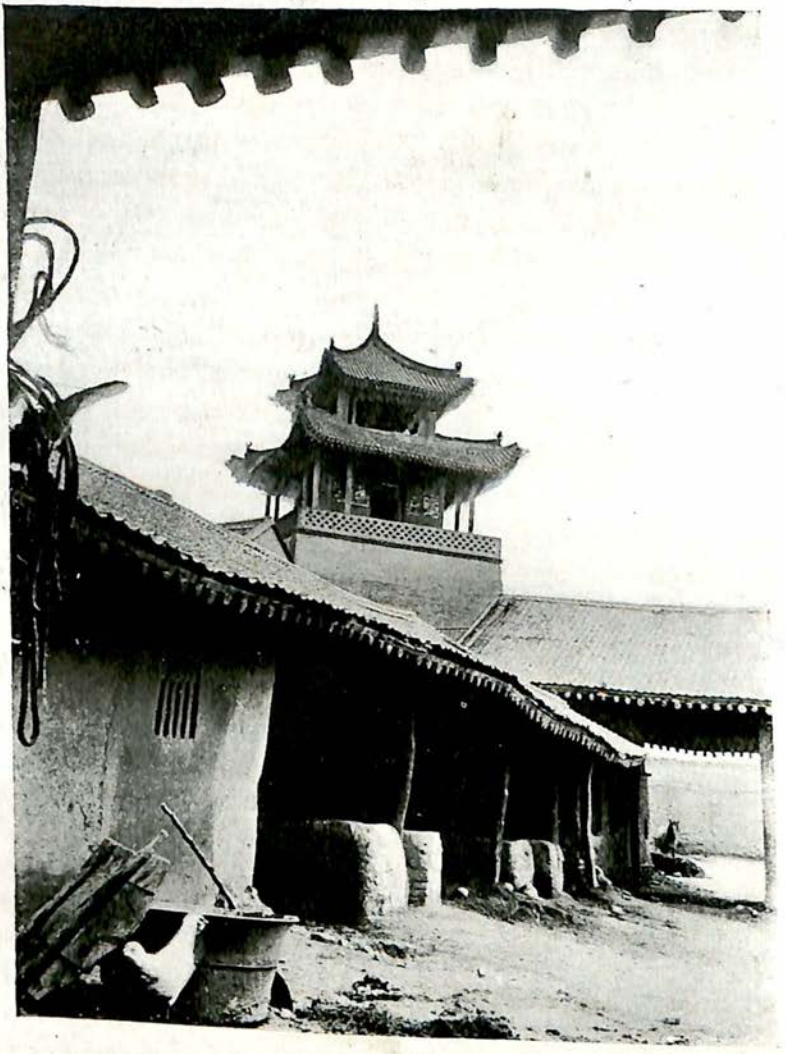
A Chinese inn, it must be remembered, exists chiefly for the mules engaged upon the track. For the needs of these three sides of the courtyard are made up in comfortable byres and stalls; their conductors lie

heaped upon one another and their landlord and their landlord's family in one dark little room, while another, no bigger, is there to serve the very rare case of some big man who may come that way. The great Mandarins, in fact, usually have their own private and official stations on the more important highways, but no amount of comfort could ever reconcile the average Chinese gentleman to the anguish of the road; so profound is his depression during the whole process, that at the day's end a dark small room with a Kang is the sum of his needs, and stalled oxen in the widest of houses would not add appreciably to the relief of arrival.

It is this Kang which is the central fact of travel in Northern China; it is unknown in the South, but throughout the North it is the very central comfort of existence. In every room one side is banked up in what looks like a solid raised platform, as if for a theatrical performance. It is either made of mud throughout, or else walled up and then planked over. This platform is hollow inside, and has little oven-doors opening either into the room itself, or through its outer wall into the yard or street. Towards dusk of each day these are opened, and the perennially smouldering fire inside is fed with a few shovelfuls of ashes, or with cagmag of dry brushwood, odds and ends of grass, and withered weeds laboriously raked all day from the sere hills and highway-sides by the ancient grannies and youngest children of the family. Gradually a grateful heat warms all the platform, increasing slowly but not excessively towards the coldest hours of the dawn; the weary muleteer unrolls his padded blanket, lies down after his few bowlfuls of gnocchi or spaghetti, and in a trice is comfortable and serene. New-comers curl up alongside, and the later ones unfurl on top, till gradually

there is a little heap of humanity lying out flaccid one upon the other like a pile of new-caught flounders.

The Kang is a notable institution indeed, and many a time does the traveller give thanks to the ever-blessed but long-forgotten mind that invented so potent an engine of civilisation—with which, for that matter, there is nothing throughout even the most frozen and northerly regions of so-called civilised Europe that can for a moment sustain comparison. Like all Chinese national inventions, it combines the maximum of effectiveness with a minimum of expense. How that warm welcome rounds off the cold prolixity of the day! For the rest, landlords in China, as in Spain, are inclined to make less of human guests than of animal. Often the existence of a guest-room is denied, and one has to forage round for oneself until one has probably discovered a very good one—this meaning a perfectly bare mud-walled apartment, with a Kang and a cobbled floor and absolutely nothing else but perhaps an old solid table against the wall, flanked by two solid old stiff armchairs on either side, in the left-hand one of which the most honoured visitor or guest must sit so as to rest his right elbow on the table. One takes possession amid perfect friendliness; the landlord's lack of initial enthusiasm rests entirely on the fact that Chinese inns charge only for the animals accommodated, and have no tariff for their conductors, so that they depend, for their visitor's rent, on their visitor's standing and sense of propriety. A few hundred cash—that is to say, about a shilling or less—is considered very handsome pay for the accommodation of two travellers, their three servants, and whole escort. The expense of the road, accordingly, is no more excessive than the luxury of the road.



AN INN-YARD IN SHENSI

There are, of course, inns and inns, nor are humans always the sole occupants of the Kang. Here comes in the use of those sheets of oilcloth that I advised. You arrive, weary and travel-stained, in the evening. In a trice the packs are lifted from the mules, and the men are busied undoing the bales of bedding. Within five minutes the Kang is spread with those oilcloth sheets in such a way that no ill thing can come nigh you, the bed is deployed on top, the table and chairs on the floor alongside. You immediately sit down on the one, make a meal off the other, and then retire into the warm security of the third, with some soporific scene from a Shakespeare tragedy to round off the day. What more could even a sybarite desire in the way of comfort plain and unadorned? With the dawn you are up again and off, for the muleteers love an early start that gives them an early end to their stage before the dark is down. And so the journey goes, from day to day, in a bland unresting lethargy of progress.

It was at Mien chih Hsien that we were first brought to realise the difficulties of the general situation; in Peking the White Wolf had been but a vague abstraction, an unimportant paragraph in the paper. Disturbances, we read, were occurring in the central provinces of the Empire. But China is a very large place, and the disturbances seemed to us satisfactorily remote from anywhere where we were likely to be. Nor does one ever quite, at a distance, conceive the possibility of other people's disturbances becoming actual to oneself. But as soon as we left the railway we understood that all the central provinces were, indeed, in a ferment, and that even Northern Shensi, immediately upon the line of our advance, could not be considered safe from the swoops of the Wolf army.

And the first result of this uncertainty was found in the fact that none of the mule contractors would hire us out a string of mules to Sian-fu, because the disorderly garrison there would be sure to commandeer them on arrival if he did, to commandeer them without pay and with every certainty of hard usage and hard work. Accordingly, after much abortive negotiation, we had to content ourselves with chartering three huge and powerful wains for the conveyance of our goods. The prospect was not pleasant, for the road between Mien Chi and Tung-gwan is justly regarded as the worst in all the Chinese Empire. And what this means only a day or two of travel along the best can make you realise. To complicate matters, the already voluminous baggage of our craft was further weighted down by our whole supply of silver, in sacks of large silver ingots in the shape of primitive boats. For there are no secure banks up-country even in the capital cities, and still less in the remote wild districts to which we were going. Therefore, there was no help for it but to carry all the two seasons' funds along with us, though it grievously added to our burdens, and lent a keen point to our desire to avoid the Wolf or any minor local jackals of his kidney.

The morning of departure was filled with unresting fuss, of bargaining, arranging, and rearranging. At last, however, all was complete, and we proceeded on our ponies out of Mien Chi in hope that the carts would duly follow, the contract being signed and sealed and safe. For in China there is no fear of defective service, and here again the traveller meets the tremendous advantage of that chain of responsibility which links up the Government in such an unbroken and unbreakable chain. When you have settled on your terms with

the mule contractor, a contract is drawn up and sealed and stamped; and the contractor is now himself responsible for the conduct of his men and his mules and your undamaged arrival at your destination. If a mule goes wrong or dies, the loss is the contractor's; if a man plays false or misbehaves, the contractor has to make matters good, even by seizure in the defaulter's family if need be. In point of fact, such measures are never called for, so perfectly does everybody understand the system of the country and the impossibility of escaping from its hold; but the reassuring fact remains that, when once your contract is stamped, the whole machinery of the Chinese Empire is pledged to its fulfilment without any further trouble on your part, even as it is pledged to your own safeguard if you hold the proper passport. Nor is this a special favour to the foreigner; it is the unvarying and immemorial rule of the Empire. Let a muleman be cheeky or an innkeeper recalcitrant, the headman of the village—though he be a ragged old dotard at the head of half a dozen hovels—is immediately responsible to the officer of the nearest small town, and he to the Mandarin of the district, and he to the Governor of the local Walled City, and he to the Prefect, and he, again, to the Viceroy of the province, and the Viceroy of the province to the Emperor on the Dragon Throne.

I have to insist on this point, as it is the keynote of Chinese travel, perhaps the most marvellous organisation in a land of marvellous organisations, and one which seems quite unknown to people at home in general. The system works, indeed, by force of many ages, with such ingrained ease that its penalties and weights of vicarious responsibility are never imposed; but they remain very definitely in force, and not the highest

Viceroy of the lot could hope to escape their power. For, even if the individual could manage to make a successful run for it—which is in the last degree unlikely—there would still remain his family in the power of justice, to be squeezed and oppressed in his place until the penalty is paid. This is, indeed, the supreme hold of Chinese law. Every man feels himself, not as an individual, but as a corpuscle in a huge organism—his village, his town, his guild, his society; in fact, conterminous only with the Empire. And the basal unit of this colossal and all-pervading bond is the family, whose safety and honour it is nothing short of sacrilege for a Chinese to imperil. We, in our Western enlightenment, find it hard to understand this pitch of primeval superstition. To escape personal loss or discomfort, we would jettison whole cargoes of relations: uncles and aunts would be three a penny, cousins could be thrown in by the gross, and we should still less feel a megrim about the fame of dead and gone ancestors, passed beyond mortal concerns; so that it is very hard for us to understand what a grip Chinese law has over the individual through his family, and how regard for dead or living grandparents can chain even the most grasping and rascally mule contractor to his bargain. The fact, however, is sure, and on its rock of assurance the traveller can rest in comfort, laying anxiety aside.

None the less, it was long before the carts hove into sight, staggering like drunken galleons over the bare upland, each with a white flag fluttering at its prow to announce to the world our quality and provenance. The difficulties of the road begin at once. Between the lowlands of Honan and those of Shensi there intervenes a wild and irregular strip of mountainous country, not running very high, indeed, but offering every imaginable

inconvenience to wheeled traffic. Through this country the Hwang Hor and the Wei Hor have to break their united way; and over these rocky moorlands and down these headlong ravines runs what is perhaps the greatest highway of the world, the very artery of commerce between Peking and Central Asia, Western Russia, Lhasa, India, and Constantinople.

Such a road as it is, too; no Westmorland mountain lane would call it cousin. Up hill and down dale it reels and clambers and coils, just wide enough for the gauge of one cart, traversing morasses of orange mud and reef after reef of rocky outcrop. One wheel is in an abyss, the other cocked aloft on a boulder; the mules strain frantically, the men shout and frantically crack the long whips with which they hearten their beasts but never strike them. Crack, crash, bang, thump, and the boulder is surmounted; the huge cart crashes down into a fresh lake of mud, and there squats, leadenly immovable, in front of a fresh reef of sharp rocks. Nothing but the wide span of the wheels could save it from capsizing half a dozen times in ten minutes; even as it is, this often happens, and the cart has to be laboriously got on to its feet again. Small wonder that no one takes carts over the Honan-Shensi border unless under pressure of the most inexorable necessity.

Yet it is, indeed, a frequented road. For the first few days you advance in an almost unbroken caterpillar of men, mules, and camels. All the world seems on the move, and the brown bare moorland is gay with that long endless coil of blue figures, conveying, often, all their goods towards a new home, on a strange wheelbarrow with its wheel at one side. Bedding and a few poor chattels make the load, and on the top sits the venerable form of Lao Dada, or the latest brew of

babies, whom papa and mamma are laboriously propelling over the boulders and morasses of the way. There is, in fact, a dense wave of emigration setting westward nowadays from the overcrowded province of Shantung towards the roomier plains of North Central China; the wise paternal Government is encouraging this with grants and cheap tenures, and thus it is that the population travels in default of trains.

To see a whole people on the move is no ordinary sight, and the spectacle gains poignancy from the contrast of its surroundings. The country is one of undulating high downs and passes, gradually increasing in height until you are frowned down upon by masses of blue and purple fell that exactly recall the hills of Westmorland in spring, and send down the same icy wind to ruffle across the uplands at their feet. Despite the far-seen russet line of the road; despite the stately tablets set up here and there by the highway-side to commemorate the virtues of such widows as, being still under thirty, have refused all temptations to remarry; despite the numerous little eating shops all along that cater with eggs and millet soup for the needs of the pilgrims, this seems pre-eminently as grim and glorious a no-man's land as the blue and purple stretches behind Ingleborough; and that unbroken string of patient blue figures for ever toiling through the bitter wind along that bitter road derives a new pathos and a new romance from the inhospitable splendour of their scene.

Consult an Appendix for the stages to Sian: I will not so soon challenge your patience with a list of unpronounceable names. Figure the carts, then, for some days reeling and staggering up and down that unspeakable track, through a dead world of cold in which only golden sheets of jasmine here and there give

promise of spring. At last, though, the initial barriers were overcome, and we descended into an ugly country of flat-terraced loess hills all brown and sere, with here and there a village growing out of some ravine, dark-pitted into its sheer walls with doors of dwelling-places till the whole cliff looks like a marten-haunted sandpit. Down the shingled bed of a wide river we progressed for many miles towards our destination, dimly visible far away ahead for hours before we drew near. But the shingle was macadam to the highway we had quitted, and the journey was diversified with flights of ducks and honking geese, with an occasional glimpse of a beautiful little rose-pink ibis. The long day closed in sombre splendour; for at last we arrived at Shan-jô in the early dusk. Behind the city rose a range of fortified hills, intensely purple in the gathering darkness that was intensified by a bank of ink-black cloud that formed their background; against which flared with uncanny brilliance the battlemented wall of the city, all encrusted with a golden lichen that turned it to pure sunshine against the ominous obscurity behind and the dim dulness of the flat field-stretches in front.

Here was the end of our most anxious day in this part of the journey, for the hills and ravines in these parts are filled with brigands; and, despite high sanctions and the responsibility of the Government, nobody wishes to undergo the inconvenience of being robbed, no matter how certain be the compensation; nor, for very good reasons, does one desire that yet ampler compensation which Legations exact for a slit throat. Purdom himself, indeed, had been attacked just outside Shan-jô itself in 1911 by a gang of some two hundred robbers; so that, as we drew near the town, we viewed the landscape o'er, like Moses, and with an equally

suspicious eye. The prospect, however, was full of peaceful peasants; we eluded the town, and put up in the southern suburb, according to the frequent rule of travel. For, owing to the fact that all the cities close their gates at sundown, there has invariably grown up a suburb of mule inns outside each, where the belated trains put up, and of which, in the end, the main mule traffic of the road makes use, avoiding the intricacies and extortions of the intramural hostelries.

From Shan-jô onwards, despite occasional undulations, one is in the loess plain of Northern Shensi, the ancestral heart of China. It is a voor, drear land in spring, but often concealed from sight, as the road sinks into blind gullies that may continue for miles. In the side of the narrow drain occasional sidings are scooped, and as we enter each the mulemen raise a long chant of warning to any other cart that may be advancing to meet theirs. None the less, blocks and stoppages are frequent, and still more frequently do the huge carts get embogged in the morasses and lakes of mud that fill the bottom of the gully and in many places stretch out for hundreds of yards. By degrees, however, these ravines give place to more negotiable country of wide stretches and prospects. Far away to the right are the uniform hills of Shansi, towering along the horizon in a line of soft blue, while along their feet comes the yellow serpent of the Hwang Hor, advancing to the point where it incorporates the Wei Hor, and breaks away to our right on its road to the sea; on the left, by degrees, towers into sight immediately overhead the majesty of the Tsin-Ling, flecked with occasional snowfields. In a vast curve the great range sweeps across the breadth of Shensi, thus dividing the province into two halves and two climates; here it curves round

HWA-JÔ CITY WALL, AND HWA S'AN THE HOLY (PLAIN OF SHENSI)

towards the Hwang Hor, and the river and the mountains on each side of it, converging to this juncture, thus form the gate of the Chinese Empire, the key to Peking and all the north-west.

Here, almost hidden until you have entered it, amid converging steeps of the downs, lurks the strong city of Tung Gwan, with powerful walls climbing the hills all round. The power that holds Tung Gwan holds all the Central Empire, holds Turkestan and Tibet, has power of life and death over the Imperial City and the coastal provinces; for this is the one channel of communication between Peking and all the inland roads away to Moscow and Lhasa. The Tsin-Ling cuts the Empire, in fact, into two halves: there is one road to the coast from the north, down through the defiles of Tung Gwan; and only one other, down the yet more difficult defiles of the Yangdze in the south. No wonder, then, that Tung Gwan is jealously held and stringently fortified, especially at such a time as that of our visit, when the authorities stood shivering in their shoes, knowing that the White Wolf was gathering head for the invasion of Shensi, and that none of the disorderly, ill-paid garrisons of the province were to be trusted.

On leaving Tung Gwan you emerge into the vast plain of Shensi. In ever-increasing magnificence the Tsin-Ling curve away on your left, and their foothills in mid-March are a soft white haze of plum blossom. The peaks rise very gaunt and ragged; most eminent and splendid at this end of the range is Hwa S'an the Holy. Flower Mountain is a centre of pious pilgrimage up its incredible cliffs and breakneck stairways and chain-ladders along the sheer ascents; and towers immediately over your head as you go, in wall over wall

of naked precipice, recalling on a far wilder and grander scale the nude splendours of the Rosengarten; and, indeed, the whole scene has an almost painful suggestion of the Fassa Dolomites, though here the formation runs to oddly bottle-nosed overhanging peaks, all leaning to one side, and suggestive of lesser godlings under the enormous supremacy of Hwa S'an. Beneath the shadow of Flower Mountain stands Flower Temple, surrounded by a bustling town where baskets are manufactured in the most seductive variety, and in former times other seductions were provided by the liberal-minded little ladies of the temple. But the glories of Flower Temple are faded now. It is a huge and stately place, indeed, embowered in groves and parks; but to-day it stands bare and derelict as an old barn, in a noble and beautiful precinct full of buildings all collapsing, the frescoes gone, the stone railings of the dried-up pools and the tiling of the roofs mutilated and dropping in decay. Saddened with the twilight in that huge sad place, I strolled at last back to the inn, and there we made merry with two pedlar urchins who appeared with trays of buns—ragged, jolly gnomes of five or six, but as old as all the wickedness of the world.

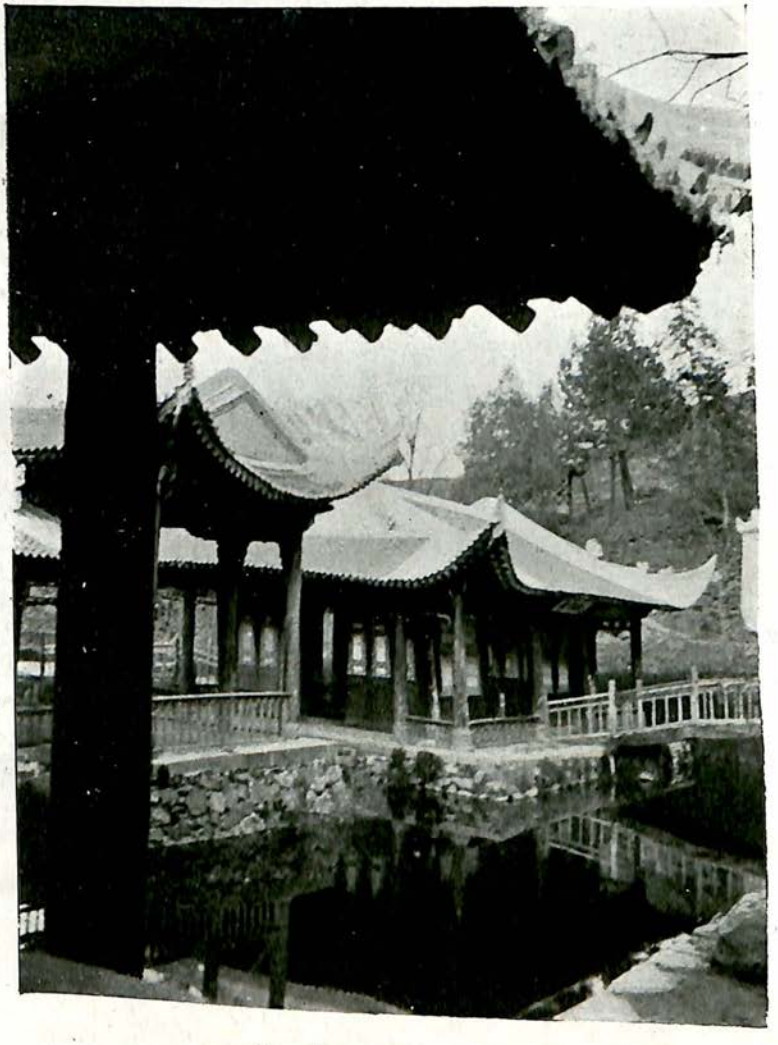
Across the monotonous plain we now drift towards the capital. The wide face of the land unfolds ever wider and wider, and the mountains curve away ever farther and farther to the left. Villages of evil reputation lurk along their feet amid the white cloud of the orchards; the road skirts their alleys, and strikes outward again across the expanses of the open country. We are nearing Sian: one last stage may be made at Lin Tung. Nor should this stage be omitted, for Lin Tung is quite the most charming place along all this northern road. Under the shadow of a high hill, quite

recently replanted with skinny poplar saplings, lies the square enclosure of Lin Tung Town; but our journey's end is farther on, to where, beneath the hill itself, lies tucked the delicious haunt of Lin Tung Baths. Here, nestling under the slope and piled upon its flank, are a brood of elegant little old Chinese pavilions, stair above stair flight of them, with elaborate latticed windows and the upcurling roofs of convention. In and out among them meander lakes and pools of soft warm sulphur water, steaming gently up into the calm air of the sundown. Sheets of golden jasmine shine reflected in the water, and lilac, rose, and peony are terraced up in borders here and there beneath the buildings. Behind, along the hills, are stretched the orchards in drifts of whitish cloud or dingy snow; before you lies expanded all the immensity of the plain, mammiferous away to the horizon with barrows of long-dead Emperors. In this haunt of ancient peace you choose your pavilion and its accompanying bath, and are happy in an exquisite seclusion of repose after travel; outside there are commoner pools for the mixed bathing of persons less august, and the inevitable magnificent theatre built up on columns, solid and beautiful, for the itinerant companies whose performances are always essential to religious festivals, and whose stage, therefore, is always found in front of the local temple or place of foregathering.

From Lin Tung to Sian is no long stretch. Out in the plain lies the capital of Shensi, the immemorial capital of the Chinese Empire, seat of the Imperial lines of Han and Tang in the highest days of Art that the world has ever known. The whole plain, indeed, now seems haunted with dead memories and a breath of weary antiquity. Everywhere in the distance rise the

long leisurely monticules that mark the barrows of Sovereigns and Princes for countless centuries forgotten. Mounds of all sizes fill the view: the Imperial tombs are like veritable hills, as far as eye can reach. Inviolate and inviolable their occupants are at rest; but many of the mounds betray the anxiety of their proprietors lest they should not always remain so, for some of these laborious compilations are but shams, containing nothing, but erected to lead treasure-seekers off the scent of the spot where indeed His Majesty reposes amid his treasures. Aided by veneration, such precautions are usually effective. No mortal eye has yet lit on that vast underground palace in the plain where lies a certain demon-haunted Emperor in the culminating inmost room, beyond labyrinthine gallery after gallery of gorgeous apartments, designed in intentional intricacy to baffle the fiends who would assuredly try to pursue the Sovereign's soul down the winding corridors to its inmost lair.

The atmosphere of death and ancient stagnation grows heavier and heavier as you approach the dethroned Imperial city. Prone upon the plain, it gives no sign of its presence from afar, and you are at last surprised to see rising ahead of you the line of walls and towers that marks the whereabouts of Sian. Pale blue in the distance on the left rise the snow-streaked heights of the Tsin-Ling, very far away, and at length you pass under the enormous gate tower—the most impressive of all I have seen in China—and find yourself in what used to be the Manchu city, now an abomination of desolation, with one interminable straight wide street, rebuilt with houses half foreign and half Chinese, most of them shuttered, and presenting a very dreary effect. Beyond this, yet another gate leads into the actual town of



THE BATHS OF LIN TUNG

Sian, a humming hive of activities, thronged with people and gay with shops of all descriptions. Here, after many windings and turnings, we were deposited at the door of a large and important inn, and the first stage of our trail found its conclusion in the big rooms at the end of the last yard which are always *par excellence* the rooms of honour for the traveller.

CHAPTER IV

SIAN-FU AND WESTWARD

I CONFESS to no love for the City of Western Peace. To me it is a "great 'owling endless place," full of dust and mud and smells, and an oppressive acrid atmosphere of malignant deadness. It is flat and squalid, either in vast expanses of desolation and ruin, or in huddled rabbit-warrens of busy streets. Somehow the dead are more present here, though, to every sense than the living. They so enormously preponderate over the ephemeral modern life of the place as to give it a crushed, haunted, sinister note. Wherever you turn it is the dead that nod and beck and blink at you drearily; it is dead men's dust that chokes your nostrils; it is from the mud of Imperial Cæsars dead and turned to clay that your houses are built; it is from the bones of four thousand years that your cabbages take their being. There is no room in Sian for the living beneath the awful omnipresence of the dead and their dead ages. Though, indeed, the dead are ever with us, nowhere else is it in such stifling and overwhelming force as in Sian. It amounts to this—the dead are so omnipresent here that one feels that one is no longer actual oneself. One changes places with them; it is they that are real masters of the situation in their incalculable multitudes, while one's own being is transformed to an exiguous ghost feebly threading its way amid the full-blooded

population of the dead. One expects every moment to see the unreal picture dissolve, the scene of shops and streets and mortal crowds to wear thin and dissipate, revealing behind the essential reality of the scene the crowding millions of anguishes and sins and loves and hates surviving inexhaustibly out of the unfathomable past.

The acrid smell of death is fresher here, though, than the Han Dynasty, and Sian hardly yet seems clear from the massacre of the ten thousand Manchus who died between a Sunday and a Wednesday on the outbreak of the Revolution. Their city, walled off in the kernel of the capital, was put utterly to the sack, and still remains a wilderness of tumbled grey ruins, open and defenceless now, for its enclosing wall was razed to the ground that the memory of its haughty isolation might be obliterated. The destruction was pitiless and complete: the women made for the deep narrow wells in crowds, and were fortunate if they found room in their depths. In the overthronged Mission Hospital the patients would even apologise for having survived on the ground that the wells were all full. The medical missionaries had a busy time with wounds and illness, and its members appeared to think they deserved credit for not having turned away the innocent daughter of a provincial Governor who in the Boxer troubles had shown himself mercilessly anti-foreign. It was, they said, "such an advertisement of Christianity." But no amount of hospitality, of devotion, and of that really holy humanity which rises superior even to considerations of religion or revenge, could avail to mitigate the miseries of the fallen Manchu population; and to this day there is many a millionaire merchant or banker of the former régime now plying a broom or pushing a

barrow in the streets of Sian for his daily crust, and thankful still to be alive to do so, though stripped of all he had. No wonder the place, despite its busyness and glare and hustle, has an atmosphere of ancient doom and modern misery.

It will be long before the City of Western Peace becomes the resort of sightseers. Yet Sian and its neighbourhood provide more sights to see than most inland Chinese capitals, in case the blessed day of trains *de luxe* and steam-heated hotels should ever dawn for it. The rolling plain, all round as far as you can see, is full of mounds and barrows; and two noble pagodas invite inspection. Or you can mount the wall and study the whole flat extent of the city; you can ascend the Drum Tower, and from the vast darkness of its loft look out towards the turquoise roofs of the Mahomedan mosque, and, beyond these, to the orange gables of the Imperial Palace, where the Grand Dowager pitched her flying tents in 1900. A separate abode had been appointed by the authorities for the Emperor, but the astute and Sacred Aunt was not going to run any risk of his escaping from her influence, and so insisted on his sharing her own dwelling-place. Here, then, for a year or so the majesty of China held court, except when it went out in summer to the Temple of the Eight Fairies for a little fresh air and relaxation from the cares of State. There the Grand Dowager would unbend among her favourite flowers, and the Temple of the Eight Fairies still cherishes the results of her leisure in a series of peony portraits painted by the August Hand.

Another great Empress has left the mark of her hand in Sian, and you may still see the ruined palace of the dynasty that she herself so nearly succeeded in sup-

Lion of Justice outside the Viceregal Palace

planting. Alas! the ruins of the Tang Palace give even more work to the imagination and less to the eye than do those of the Brazen Palace at Anuradhapura. You pass through the tunnelled archway of its wall, and you find yourself in a vast rectangle of perfectly level lawn on which no trace whatever of human habitation remains to disturb the unbroken plain of the turf, except that at the far end there stands an irregular mass of rock. And on this, they say, remains the hand-print of the Dowager Empress Wu.

No monarchy in the world's history except the Chinese has ever satisfactorily solved the problem of finding a place for the widow of a Sovereign. Nothing awaited a Roman Empress after the death of her Augustus except a convent, or remarriage with the next ruler; and the Dowagers of modern days, respected and comfortable, sink into the complete obscurity of bazaar-openers, and no longer have any constitutional existence. The case is very different in China. The Dowager Empress here stands for the ancestors, and is in the position of mother to the reigning Sovereign, whether he be indeed her son or no. She is thus invested not only with the majesty of her dead husband and the line of his predecessors, but with the weight of motherhood enhanced by the quasi-divine position alike of mother and son. It will easily be seen, then, what tremendous importance attaches to the Empresses Dowager of China, and the tremendous power which they can exercise if they are women of ambition or ability (as wives they had all counted for nothing, and of eminent Empresses Consort Chinese history is virtually empty), and the responsible constitutional position that attaches to them anyhow, whether they be able or no. The Lady Wu had a career, however, more

singular than most. She started life from a very low level, as a shaven-headed little nun attached to the Court. Brought into the palace as a counter-attraction to the reigning favourite, she not only supplanted the favourite, but also the Empress who had invoked her aid; and when the young Emperor succeeded, his morganatic stepmother assumed the rank and authority of Empress Dowager with so decisive a hand that the Sovereign himself sank into a mere shadow, and it was ultimately believed that Madame Wu had no less an object in mind than to displace the House of Tang and erect her own dynasty in its room.

For many years, indeed, she governed China with the most rigorous ability, covering the Empire with a network of spies. Her reign was a reign of terror, yet so conspicuous and successful that, when at last a palace-plot removed her from power, the ex-Empress Dowager did not share the almost universal fate of fallen Sovereigns (except in China), but was allowed to end her days with honour and glory in a comfortable retirement. Though even to this hour her reign is not recognised in Chinese history, where the only Sovereign female name is that of the Empress Regnant Lu. So came and so passed the terrible Lady Wu. Look round to-day on the scene of her triumphs and plots. Gone is the Empress, and gone every vestige of that palace where so many tragedies were acted. To-day the grass has levelled all the royal residence beneath a pall of perfectly smooth green, and the little pink stars of Androsace in the grass, the golden flaunting celandines off the high loess wall, replace the gilding and the carving and the manifold glories of the House of Tang. Nothing remains of Wu the Empress except a splendid memory stained with crime, and the fabled imprint of her

Imperial hand on that rock which alone has survived the ruin of her palace. In the gaunt and desolate spring wind ruffling across that gaunt and desolate expanse it is helpful in these days of storm to realise that this utterly vanished life was once as strenuous as our own, and that Wu the Great, to most of us not even now a bare name, was once a woman and a Sovereign as actual and active as Victoria or Elizabeth.

At every turn Sian is haunted by such memories. The most famous sight is what they call the Forest of Tablets. This is a huge volume of the Confucian writings inscribed on tall stone slabs arranged side by side in long high hedges under cover of so many corridor-shanties. The effect, though, is not impressive, suggesting that after the burning of a museum all its Assyrian steles have been huddled together in rows under the temporary protection of a series of wooden cow-byres, dark and undignified. One wanders down the long dim corridors, walled in by these unilluminating inscriptions, without deriving much edification; nor do even the other stone monuments of the place inspire one with enthusiasm. The precincts are many and wide, crowded with every sort of writing in every sort of Chinese character. Auspicious specimens of calligraphy are here of famous artists and Emperors, and writings dating back to the earliest known forms of the Chinese script; and though to the uninstructed traveller the Forest of Tablets offers nothing very interesting or beautiful, to the sinologue it must be, no doubt, of inexhaustible interest. The place, indeed, is always full of Chinese engaged in taking rubbings of tablets or carving, often commissioned by European or American museums: the passer-by is bound to buy a few of these to take away with him at the cost of a copper or so. For some of the carvings

well deserve the pains; here and there amid the wilderness of writings some great painter has inscribed a scene instead of transcribing a text. There is a very beautiful stem of bamboo on one slab, the Storks in the Pine-tree are famous, and so is the elaborate plan of Flower Mountain with all its shrines mapped out; but the most delightful of the lot is the stele of Our Lady of Mercy smiling down upon a rocky little pool in a mountain torrent from which a child is rescuing a drowning phéasant.

Much less attractive is the Nestorian Tablet, though much more famous among Europeans, as giving the missionary record of a certain Nestorian Bishop in the early ages who has long since, no doubt, with all his followers, been frying eternally, according to orthodox Christian belief. However, even the traces of a damned heretic have a quasi-Christian interest for Christian people, and the tablet has accordingly been furiously attacked, and as furiously defended. Not to waste ink on such a topic, the genuineness of the inscription in general is no longer seriously impugned by the learned, but the shallow cross scratched in at the top of the carving in an adequate space is clearly the work of a later hand determined to carry conviction. The precinct, however, rejoices in matters of much more importance. For the Forest of Tablets only occupies a portion of the space allotted to the huge temple of Confucius, a calm, void place, beautiful and dim with ancient trees. In the main shrine sits the presentment of the sage himself, and you may also see his portrait drawn upon a tablet. But not even this arouses much emotion. For, unless the artists have done him grave disservice, Confucius appears to have been a plain and arid-looking old person, austere and

precise, with something in his look of that bare unadorned sterility of thought that makes his philosophy as uninspiring to the imagination as it is useful and practical in method. You can see he is a man of rules and wise cut-and-dried regulations and rigid logic: he gives no hint of a wider outlook, of the human and superhuman sympathies essential to the genuine Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the universe. He would meet the weary and heavy-laden soul only with prescriptions for the ritual honouring of ancestors, and for comforting, as apart from the rule of stern common sense, one might as profitably go to the valley of dry bones as to Confucius.

It is fortunate that the Chinese are so intensely practical a race, with so little real inclination to trouble their heads about the shadows and obscure places of the soul, and about any hungers less immediate than those of the belly. The very fiends and supernatural powers by whom their whole life is encompassed work chiefly (like the Romans') on the material world of wealth, of dearth, sickness or health; and the underworld over which they rule is an exact replica of our own, with the same conditions of life and the same magistracies in force. Thus it is that they ask no more of religion than to be a guide to all the best means of securing a livelihood here and hereafter; and find, therefore, exactly what they want in the rules of conduct and worship dictated by Confucius.

It is said, indeed, of every Chinese that he is born a Buddhist, lives a Confucian, and dies a Daoist—this to express the high destiny in which he enters life, the practical course in which he lives it, and the atmosphere of sacraments and mystic sanctions in which the inevitable death-terror impels every human soul in East or

West to wish to leave it, guaranteed into the Unknown World by powerful and proper introductions. But, in fact, except for those moments of terror when gods have power over all men, the Chinese is a Confucian to the bone in the whole process of his existence; and finds in those dry moralities more sense and profit than in the towering philosophy of the Buddha, or the no less mystic though much more nebulous doctrines of Christianity—so far as he is able to make himself any notion of what these are, amid the mutual hostilities and contradictions of the various Christian Churches, sects, and schisms.

However, the vast silence of these old Confucian courts was soon disturbed by the crash of war, and our meditations concerned matters more immediate than creeds. We were delayed some time in Sian: first of all Purdom took sick, and then I followed suit. And in the meantime the City of Western Peace became the City of Fear and Storm. For the White Wolf, that far-away name, had suddenly materialised in a very fearful way, and was bursting his way up through Southern Shensi to the capital, leaving behind him a trail of big cities sacked and burned. Every day he drew nearer, and the hours were filled with incessant alarms. It became clear beyond a doubt that he was making for the capital; and the capital's powers of resistance were by no means so obvious. In fact, the garrison and troops quartered in Sian were thoroughly unsatisfactory; nor were even their leaders of any certain loyalty. China, the oldest of the world's sovereign peoples, is also the only one that has really assimilated anti-military principles; and China, with many high advantages, reaps also the corresponding disadvantages. Whereas in Japan and Europe the soldier is the apex of the State, and the merchant its lowest base, in China

the popular estimate is reversed, and the trade of human bloodshed, so far from having the crown of honour, is held in real and general contempt. The soldier is a man who has sold himself to the unholy purposes of others. It is interesting to find a deep substratum of this thought in the only other great nation that is still primarily commercial and pacific: in England also, except "when the band begins to play," there was a general popular feeling that Tommy Atkins has bartered away his liberty and made himself the automaton of bad forces not his own. But the feeling is assuredly stronger in China, and the results correspondingly graver. For where you despise you degrade, and by the very fact of contemning an employment you lower the character of those who ply it.

Thus Japan, haughtily contemptuous of commerce in the old days, still to-day is hampered by the consequent stigma of dishonesty in trade, the necessary result of conditions in which the only people who would engage in it were men of no standing, who, having no character to start with, had no character to lose. And thus China, always looking to peace for her methods, and always despising the necessity of force and of men to employ it, had arrived, by dint of rating the soldier as a mere low ruffian, at an army consisting of nothing better—of men without traditions of loyalty or restraint, untrustworthy, cowardly, and not to be distinguished from the brigands and robbers with which public opinion universally confounds them. The only recruiting-ground of the army was among the outcast and the outlawed: no man of decent life or breeding, no matter how humble, would engage; till in the end the army became a byword of abhorrence and contempt. Nowadays, of course, things are changing, and the

initial strength of the present Emperor,* the foundation of his ascent, lay in his having from the beginning aimed at consolidating an army on higher lines of treatment and consideration. But the traditions of four thousand years do not yield to the laws and edicts of four months, as people appear to expect: and the earlier armies of the Republic by no means deserved or enjoyed the public confidence.

In fact, it was even said that the White Wolves might prove preferable to the troops sent against them, if it was necessary to undergo one set of brigands or another; and nobody doubted that at a push the whole garrison of Sian would join hands with the enemy and open the gates. Alarums and excursions filled each hour of the day, and every morning brought fresh conflicting news about the Wolf. This mysterious person was probably, like Cerberus, three gentlemen (at a very low computation) with the same name; in fact, there seem to have been as many White Wolves as there were insurgent bodies for them to lead, which accounts for the diversity of opinion about White Wolf, at that time talked of as one and indivisible. Some people reported him a cultured and polite person, with his forces well in hand: gentle mission ladies developed ambitions to meet him at tea. Then would come the tale of the sacks and slaughters made at Lao-ho-kow and Gin-dze Gwan; the Wolf's character would darken, and the mission ladies' ambition develop in the direction of the wings of a dove. Meanwhile the situation grew more perilous every hour, and the Viceroy of Shensi sallied forth in a sedan-chair to take the field in person, only, it was said, to slink back defeated into the city by stealth a

* *Quantum mutatus ab illo;* the Emperor of a month is now but the late ex-President.

BOGGED. CARTS IN THE MUD OF A VILLAGE STREET ON THE ROAD UP TO SIAN-FU

few days later. But no one knew for certain what to make of all the stories that so incessantly flew about. The one thing sure was the imminent and advancing peril. Troops, indeed, were coming up from Tung Gwan, but it was quite uncertain whether the Wolves would not outstrip them in the race for Sian: population and officials alike were in a state of panic excitement day and night. The vast gates of the city were shut, and the streets were filled with rattles and drummings through the darkness, and it was getting high time for all foreigners in the neighbourhood to be raked inside the comparative security of the walls.

It was certainly no moment to leave Sian for the wild lands of the west. But the spring was drawing on every day, and the glorious Magnolia in the mission compound—a Yulan of the stature of a forest tree—had shed by now the pearly chalices of its blossom in a shower of browning malodorous messes. Our own various ailments were healing, and so by degrees was the sore on the back of the white pony. It was clearly time for us to be off, though nothing seemed propitious—what with the Wolves devastating the country, and some of them with sympathies in Kiai-jô, and all of them quite likely to coalesce with the Mohammedans, and let loose Hell over the face of Northern China. In fact, for a moment we even contemplated reversing the order of our season, and, leaving Chago for next year, making off now for the remote and untroubled Alps above Sining. The notion lasted only for a short time, but now, looking back, I can see that Fate here gave us another of her hints, by which we should have done wisely to profit. But the abandonment of plans is always a repulsive proceeding, except where circumstances absolutely compel; and the more challenges thrown out by the

perversity of things, the more does one feel one's pride involved in carrying one's original purposes through to their fulfilment. So we began to push our plans, though by this time the tale went that the troops had been cut up by the Wolves in Shan-jô, and that now only Lan-tien lay between us and the invaders, into which the Viceroy had desperately thrown himself, forbidden by a telegram from Peking to take the field again with his miserable regiments until the promised reinforcements should have come up from Honan. Worse than all for our purposes, even the West Gate was now reported shut, and the westward road reported now impassable with the hordes of brigands that always emerge in the moment of any Chinese insurrection and help to swell its forces from district to district.

It was no wonder that, even when we had succeeded in chartering a mule-train (a task of much difficulty, as all the mules were commandeered by the military), and even when we had induced the contractor to let us out a train to go west, the beasts had to be kept in a close concealment till we were ready to go, for fear the soldiers should seize them in defiance of our very passport. The next difficulty was yet graver: the Chinese Foreign Office at Sian was desperately reluctant to let us go. At this, again, one cannot wonder. China was responsible for our safety, and here were we proposing to quit the shelter of the city, and pass out into the storms now raging beyond its walls—nay, even proposing to penetrate away westward, through the perils of a country all in upheaval, towards the yet wilder uncertainties of the Tibetan March, where sympathetic outbreaks were sure to accompany the general chaos in China proper. The Foreign Office was not to be fairly blamed because it procrastinated and politely evaded

from day to day in a manner that made one grip hold of one's temper with both hands. The methods of China, however, though maddening to the simple-minded (who expects from the Oriental the same short, straight answer that, in point of fact, he would never receive from his own Chancellery, and which would grievously annoy him if he did), are first of all incurable, and secondly comprehensible.

There is a compelling desire, in fact, to avoid the unpleasantness of plain speech and denial. Those who accuse Chinese diplomacy of being mere cowardice forget that the same thing might be said of all diplomacy, which is simply the civilised way of supplying needs that the Cave-man saw to with a stone-axe. If it be more cowardly to say "If you please" than to tear your interlocutor's throat out then and there, then all diplomacy and all civilisation are mere cowardice, and the last state of mankind is evidently worse than the first. And China, in the matter of dealing with other people, is more civilised than most, besides being more powerless—a position which, more than any other, inculcates a sedulous civility. This ancient and august Empire has suffered too much not to have learned that large assumptions go ill unless your fist is amply mailed; among rough schoolboys you must not take up attitudes, unless your strength can make them good. Amid the brutal egoisms of the Western nations China stands like a high-mannered but helpless marquise in the grip of a revolutionary mob: the high manners are merely an additional irritation in the helpless, and in the most cautious and cunning politeness alone lies any hope of safety. Therefore a battle between travellers and Chinese officials is a long fight of courtesies and urbanities, in which only the most patient wins. Do not

hurry or insist or lose your temper, then; it would defeat your ends, not only by showing weakness, but also by introducing the element of personal offence. Meet civility, then, with untiring civility, maintain your point firmly but quite gently, with an incessant pressure of sweet reasonableness, explanations, compliments, and promises of caution; then, if you can properly appreciate the position of both parties, you will find the long game play itself out with smoothness, and at last will come to your desire amid the mutual satisfaction of all parties concerned.

The Chinese official is four thousand miles and four thousand years removed from the brutal offensiveness of a European policeman or douanier; no functionary in the world so well repays and understands the amenities of life and the laws of politeness in controversy. Meet him in his own spirit, and all difficulties and unpleasantnesses are ironed out automatically; give rein to your impatience, show yourself peevish and ill-mannered; immediately his civility takes a colder tone, and a passive and intangible opposition will impede your plans on every side. I take this chance of propounding my point for the benefit of would-be travellers in the interior of China; for nowhere else did we meet such persistent and such handsomely justified opposition on the part of the Chinese. Yet even here, by dint of patience and persuasion, our point was won, and, against all probability and all prudence, we were granted permission to take our flight westward. We were certainly the last Europeans to be allowed out of Sian, the only ones who dreamed of going on into the west, farther and farther into the gathering storms. The missionaries were amazed at our good fortune and success.

So dawned at last the day of departure. With a

strong effort of will I had made my temperature go down and stay down; so nothing remained to imperil our start. But the sore on the white pony was no better, after all, and this (combined with the baser considerations of comfort) impelled me to prefer a sedan-chair for my own further progress. In point of fact, a chair is by far the most desirable way of traversing the plains of Central China. It has the disadvantages, indeed, of being rather dizzying to one's head in time, and cramping to one's legs, but these are as nothing to its many benefits. For in the chair you can sit cosily wrapped up, with rugs round your knees and feet; your mind can attach itself unreservedly to the scenes you are traversing, or, when tired of doing so, can either doze or read a book or allow you to take a little snack of food at ease. On the contrary, there is no point in riding across this country. You cannot diversify the way with trottings and canterings, as you have to keep close all the time to your plodding caravan in case of mischance or quarrels by the way; the cold winds congeal your feet, your attention is always preoccupied with your mount, and (finally and most important) much of these long stages is so dull and flat that all you want is to traverse them unnoticing, in a drowze, saving up your strength and endurance for the mountain country, where you will have to ride perforce, and are often very thankful when the track allows you a mile or so's chance of doing it. Therefore by all means economise yourself in the plains, where there is nothing gained by enduring the long and tedious day on horseback, advancing at a foot's pace from dawn to dusk along uninteresting ground. By all means take a chair and pack yourself comfortably up inside, with food and books and blankets. But remember that you must

take a chair with four bearers, as a lesser number would be unworthy of your rank, and level you with the common herd who go cheaply about with only two or three.

Into the sedan of plaited bamboo-strips I duly wadded and squeezed myself on that warm and radiant thirtieth of March; on the step above I saluted the aligned pairs of feet which were all I could see of the missionaries come to wish us good-speed; and out of Sian we drifted in an ecstasy of relief to be gone. Our first stage was but a short one, as far as Shen Yang across the Wei Hor, which we had to traverse in a crowded ferry-barge densely packed with other passengers, as well as our own eight mules, two ponies, train of servants and muleteers, with a pair of soldiers for escort, and the palanquin with me, like Lady Carabas, ensconced inside. In the inn we made ourselves comfortable betimes, and the mule-packs were readjusted, as always happens after the first experimental day of travel, which allows the muleteers to see, so to speak, where the shoe pinches on each back. The fact that it pays these men to treat their beasts with care does not destroy their credit for so invariably doing so. It would pay many an English or Continental carter to treat his a little better, and lighten the labours of justices and S.P.C.A. officials, whose lives in China would usually be lives of empty-handed ease. On the road in China, in fact, the mules and not the men are lords. On arrival in the inn the men's first task is to lift off the cradles on which the packs are strapped; then the scanty saddle is taken off—a mere frame designed to hold the cradle—and down in the welcome dust lie the stalwart great beasts, wallowing and rolling here and there, and sweeping the dust over their bellies with flirts of their tails, in a joyous abandon of relaxation.

THE MORNING START. MAFU IN A GOOD TEMPER

In spite of all care, their backs are always more or less horrible with open sores, but neither the men nor the animals seem to mind in the least, and the number of white-haired patches on each mule which mark the sites of previous sores long healed seem to show that these inevitable accidents of travel do not affect the health and vigour of the animal. For the rest, the bad place is sometimes plastered over with mud; and at the end of each stage the men may always be seen squatting busily over the cradles, readjusting the flock of cotton-wool with which each is lavishly padded. Not till the mules and their welfare are attended to do the men ever look to themselves or anyone else; in vain may you call for their help in this and that, until each man has dealt with his own beast, and hung up in a secure and separate place its elaborate tasselled headstall of crimson with bells and beads and dangling charms of all sorts to avert evil powers (just as do the ornaments of our own labour-horses), and which otherwise (or perhaps the triangular crupper of ornamented leather with similar bedizenments) his co-muleteer might appropriate in the night.

For the caravans are composite. The contractor is their focus, and gets together at need an assortment of animals with their several owners; or else it may be a band of mule-owners who pool their stock of beasts to take a train of packs down the road in common. Coming out of Sian we had employed such a contractor; and hardly had we settled down for the evening at Shen Yang than we heard how he had fared in consequence. For the soldiery had learned of the transaction, and, powerless to annoy *us*, or stop our departure with the mules they coveted, they had determined to wreak vengeance on the contractor. Foreseeing trouble, the upper landlord of the mule inn had bolted in time with

all his family and dependents; but the luckless mule-contractor had been caught by the soldiers and beheaded on the spot. At least, this was the first tale; we were subsequently told that he had merely been severely beaten! Whatever really did happen, the episode shows plainly what excellent reasons the Chinese in general have for dreading and detesting their army.

From Shen Yang the road winds out endlessly over a plain all golden now with miles of mustard, deliciously scented, in stripes and stretches among the green swathes of the young corn, with a glowing haze of peach or plum from time to time in the villages along the slow skyline. More than three weeks had we been in Sian, and in that time the spring had arrived. Golden celandines fluttered from the loess walls, and bright-eyed violets and little brilliant vetchlings and oxytropids diversified the edges of the road. But the journey itself, over all these stages, is very monotonous; and we were further disappointed in the weather. For the sweltering mornings died in a leaden haar of heat; and in the breathless greyness of these days we never once could have gathered the faintest notion that any mountains were at hand along the horizon, had we not known that there, away to the left, the whole splendid chain of the Tsin-Ling should have been rejoicing our eyes with its heights, and the rounded culminating summit of Tai Bé San, where the Takins live, ungainly beasts like the souls of Hebrew financiers reincarnate in huge grotesque cows. But never one sign of the Tsin-Ling did we see in all the days of traversing that plain. An occasional pagoda on a down is the only excitement of the way, except where the loess suddenly breaks away, and there at your very feet in the flat depths of a ravine, with another sheer wall of loess on the other side, you suddenly

find yourself looking down on the tower and village of Military Honour,* lurking below there so securely and unguessed at, beside the little river that has carved the gully.

Not till we had been three or four days on the road did we even set eyes on anything that could be called a hill. And by that time the weather had deployed its full horrors, and the world was white. On the second of April the country showed a trifle more various, with ups and downs and a noble pagoda on the distant horizon. But the day was disastrous. Cold grey skies and an icy mizzle on a bitter snow-wind greeted our uprising. The bearers and escort toiled and agonised in the cold, slipping and slithering in the greasy slime of the deliquescent track. Now one would go flop, and now another. Crash went the chair again and again, and out flew "Northanger Abbey" into the mud. At last we gave it up, even before noon though it was when we staggered into the beautifully towered and situated town of West Fu-Fung, lying out in a semi-circular sweep of wall along above its river. But it was obvious that neither men nor mules could get on any farther, so we all squashed down as best we could into a tiny pitch-dark inn, and spent the rest of the day huddling close to a pan of charcoal. The world, the next morning, was still white with new-fallen snow, of which more soon threatened to fall from the laden ice-grey sky, though below a sullen reluctant thaw was setting in, and the chief beauty of the scene lay in the heavy snow filigree on the trees. All that day, however, we progressed well, and on the next drew in at dusk to the important city of Soaring Phœnix.†

So far our journey from Sian had proceeded in the

* Wu-gung Hsien.

† Feng Hsiang-fu.

most perfect peace. It seemed as if the placid countryside had never heard of Brigands or White Wolves. Soaring Phœnix gave us the first hint of coming trouble. It is a long large dilapidated place, on the last edge of the plain before you enter the broken hilly ground of the Kansu Border. As we passed up the length of the main street in the darkening afternoon, the town turned to us a face of sullen menace. More than half the shopfronts were shuttered, and the street had a strangely desolate and yet unfriendly appearance, thronged as it was with men who eyed us with heavy stagnant faces of dislike, shuttered and repellent as the shops. Even the landlord of the ramshackle wretched inn was grudging and hostile, and made long difficulties about letting us in and providing for our comforts. Over the whole place brooded a sense of imminent storm. It was not only that Soaring Phœnix is notoriously anti-foreign in feeling, and a notorious centre of the Elder Brother League and of local rascality generally: one felt there was something more at hand, and that the evil forces were only waiting their moment to break out in some very definite way.

They seemed to be at pause, listening for the hunting-call of the White Wolf far away across the province, advancing up its eastern frontiers. Or perhaps even a little nearer than we thought? The missionaries had been warned to guard themselves carefully, indeed; and we got an illuminating glimpse into the real state of Shensi, when the two soldiers of our escort declared that rather than return to Sian across the country, they would come with us wherever we went, no matter how perilous and uncomfortable our road.

It was with genuine relief that we got clear out of Soaring Phœnix. It is a crucial point of this journey,

being a big centre, a danger spot, and the last town of any importance before you get over the border into the security of Kansu, where everybody was perfectly certain that none of the Wolves would ever penetrate. For some hours more we still had the dull plain, but at last wound away into the hills and ascended a road of horrible quags and slime to an icy wind-driven pass. Sleet was falling untidily from a quiet grey sky, as down we serpentined abruptly into a dell, and mounted again on the other in a succession of breakneck zigzags. Here we had our first sense of the nearing alps; for the road was dense with caravans coming down with goods from Tibet, skins and serge, and mule-load after mule-load of great elk-horns, precious all over China as an aphrodisiac, if the magnificent Wapiti of the Border is killed while his huge branching antlers are in the velvet. So he dies by the thousand every year, and must have died by the thousand for many centuries past. One does not know if the supply diminishes, but it is hardly possible to believe that the splendid beast must not in time become extinct.

From the top of the pass there was a wide view of grey Scotch-looking mountains under the grey sky; and then, more precipitously than ever, we descended straight upon a smiling flat champaign, far below, of green corn-fields set with peach-orchards in a rosy cloud of colour, with a little hamlet nestling in the midst. Down along a river's course went the next day's journey from Eternal-Peace-Post to Clearwaters. It was not very interesting, until at length we turned a corner, and there, far ahead of us, lay stretched a long level line of mountains, white with a solid mantle of snow. Though this was merely the last trace of winter, soon to disappear from those high downs, it was the first sight I

had had of any alpine scene, and my heart rejoiced exceedingly, and I told myself that I could feel the breath of the snow-fields. And, in that instant, behold an apparition. For round the corner, as suddenly as if she had sprung from the ground, came riding a little lady on a little donkey. From head to foot she was clothed altogether in sheer scarlet, and her tightly trousered legs clutched the sides of her mount in the shape of a diamond. And all around her came frisking her escort of several hundred little goats, every one of them as black as jet, with golden eyes. It was a most uncanny sight, that flock of prancing ebony fiendlets round the vermilion neatness of their painted lady, more vivid than ever in that clear sparkling air, upon that far background of pale hills and snow against the blue. What she betokened, though, I could never ascertain. She came and passed like a vision, with the curly little kids all skipping round her. I think she must have been a mountain fairy, bidding us welcome to the high and rugged land where you bid final farewell to the dull plains of Shensi and the evil temper of its inhabitants, and enter instead on the vast downlands and open smile of Kansu.

CHAPTER V

INTO KANSU

THE eighth of April will live long in my memory as the day that introduced me first to the beautiful hills of Kansu. At the end of the season, sated with real alps, my feelings would have been very different for these mere undulations, enormous yet obsequious; but on that eighth of April my heart fairly bounded within me as we wound straight up into a country of fells that, after the Shensi plain, might fairly deserve to be called mountains. The air was radiant, the day of cloudless loveliness. Our way ascended alongside a little beck as beryl-clear as the torrent of the Combe dei Carbonari. The folded coppiced chines on either hand continued my memory of the Cottian Alps, with here and there vivid films of green from colonies of the gracious little Bamboo* that fills all the lower woodlands of Southern Kansu. To be in wild hills again, with rocks and fern-clad boulders about, and the breath of returning spring in one's mouth, was a joy that only those can fully appreciate who have made such a journey as ours across the cultivated bareness of the Honan and Shensi plains. There was little life here as yet, as we mounted out of Clearwaters, but the wintry woodland was built up of flowering shrubs—lilac and Staphylea, brambles,

* *Arundinaria nitida*, of course, the only Bamboo in the Kansu foothills, not extending north, nor high in the Alps.

roses, honeysuckle, and Spiræa—all in time to be the commonplaces of travel in the foothills of the big ranges, but here refreshing as one's first glimpse of *Gentiana verna* on the ascent of some alpine pass. Everywhere in the open places flaunted on stately stems the white cottonwool relics of *Anemone japonica*, and in the coppice-edges as we mounted higher there twinkled the minute pale-blue stars of a wee Gentian and a golden Chrysosplenium in damp mossy places, a lovely sky-blue Fumitory, and one patch of what could only be our own beloved wood-anemone.

Still the track climbed higher and higher above the brawling becks, ascending by steep zigzags in the ravines. This pass is the Gwan San, Official Guard Mountain. There are many Gwan Sans in China, and the name implies their situation; they are the mountain ridges that separate province from province or district from district. It was here, as we were mounting the last ascent, across a perfectly bare open down, with the woodland lying below, that we met the Post. How many people who send their letters to the centre of the Chinese Empire realise how they travel, and how the answers return? Mail-trains and carriers and neat uniforms, and knocks at the door, are so ingrained by now in our imaginations that it is hardly possible to realise the absolute lack of all these conveniences in China, nor the absolute wildness of the country that one's correspondence has to traverse. It is all done by postal courier. Across the world he runs by night and day, up hill and down dale, with rings on his fingers and bells on his toes, so that from far away you can hear the cheerful jingle of his coming.

He is alone and unprotected, but no mountain can stop him, and no difficulty permanently impede his

progress. If mortal danger threatens, indeed, he tucks the bag into some safe harbour until the storm has blown over, and the delivery is once more safe; but, early or late, the fidelity of the Chinese postal service is a perpetual marvel, and though a letter may be delayed for several months in times of trouble, it is almost certain to arrive some day at its destination, so perfect is the linked chain of runners, each man having his course by day, and then handing the charge to his successor, who runs onwards through the night while his predecessor rests. But life is hard and lonely in the mountain districts; it sometimes happens that robbers take their toll of him, and in due course the skeleton is found in some sequestered fold of brushwood, with the letters scattered round it; or it may be that wolves or leopards play their part, and the bag is found inviolate, with only a gnawed bone or two to tell the tale. Never mind, the letters are picked up, and onwards goes the pack, and a few dollars amply endow the widow for a second marriage and console her for this rupture of the first. Nobody cares for the individual, so long as the public service goes forward; and it is only fair to add that, in ordinary times and in reasonable districts, outrages on the postman are as unheard-of as delays or treason on the part of the postman himself. Chinese justice moves slowly, but with inevitable incidence; and Chinese public opinion is immemorially at its service. For the Chinese are the most orderly-minded race in the world, paradoxical as this may sound, in memory of rebellions and Boxers and riots; which are, however, but as minute inflamed pimples on the firm and healthy flesh of the Empire, inoculated as it is from head to foot with ideals of law and order as the ultimate and only health for the body politic.

From the summit of the Gwan San one looks out over a ruffle of lesser ranges; but no alpine heights or nudities as yet appear in view. The trees have failed at this altitude, and the crest of the pass is bare; that the elevation is not contemptible is shown by the first sight of the Red Birch, though only in a few strayed specimens that offer little suggestion of the glory it will soon attain in the Tibetan Alps. Betula Bhojpattra is one of the most superb of trees, but has no suggestion of a birch. For it forms a stiff, sturdy, and stately round-headed mass, with gnarled and knotted boughs, rigid in its form as a sycamore, and invariably domed in a firm outline when fully developed. But its beauty is at all times characteristic and supreme. Even in winter it is beautiful, for the twigs and buds form a fog of bloomy lavender-blue, through which glint the crimson and scarlet tags of the bark, ravelling off the trunk and branches in broad flakes. In due time these are hidden by the bursting foliage of fine leaves, that never lose the first fine rapture of their delicate golden green through all the season. Whenever you see it, and in all its aspects, the Red Birch strikes you anew each time with a sense of its majesty and beauty. We shall meet it again and again farther on. Betula Bhojpattra has an enormous range, through the Himalaya, right up along all the Tibetan Marches to the cold ranges above the Koko-nor, and away through the Tsin-Ling to the forests of Japan. It is essentially an alpine tree, and, though on the Gwan San it occurs isolated here and there, you may count on meeting it in the mountains, always between certain very rigidly defined limits of some 7,500 to 9,000 feet.

No tree lends itself more whole-heartedly to the purposes of man. Its bark serves for the brown paper

in which you wrap your parcels; it also serves for water-buckets, butts, baskets, and best hats. The twigs yield brooms, and the boughs are bent for cartwheels, besides all the other uses of timber in planks and so forth; and, though I do not know on what birch-bark precisely are written the recently discovered Buddhist scripts from the sand-buried cities of the Central Asian desert, it would seem very probable that it is on that of Betula Bhojpattra. So now we leave the Gwan San, and descend abruptly, through sloughs and springs, through a glorious afternoon of melting blue and golden light, into a yet more backward and wintry world of woodland, without bud or bloom or promise, till at last the track improves so much as to be quite a little English country lane, descending through fine lawny glades upon the tiny hamlet of Jade-Hall.*

The keynote of Kansu is its enormous rolling uplands of loess, like glorified Lewes Downs, but with wide laps of ploughed land in sloping terraces. From the higher passes you look out upon higher and more rugged ranges like those of Westmorland, but there is as yet no promise of the Alps that ultimately wall in the western boundary of the province, sweeping out of Tibet in their series of parallel breakwaters. We had a notable day on the tenth of April, ascending along a beck-bed into the heart of the dark wild hills. There was no more loess here, but rocks and screes and sombre sedge-clad steeps; on the shady side a lovely pearl-pink Hellebore was already in bloom here and there, while by the path side squatted close to earth the violet chalices of a Pasque Anemone, which occurs all over these open fells. So we came at last to the summit, and then wound along, along, and along round bay after bay of

* Yü tang jen.

the downtop and from pass to pass. The day had now settled to the racy gloriousness of an April afternoon in England, with tumbled clouds of gold, and an air that seemed flooded with a spirit of celestial blue; new distances unfolded from each col over a melting azure world of rippled ranges as we coiled along that vast bare upland of loess as huge and open to the air as the Bindelweg in front of the Marmolata. On the final curve I could restrain myself no longer, but alighted and ran down the track to the bed of the Wei Hor lying far below. The loess fell was hard and smooth; in places the track was a sheer white slide, as slippery and blank as ice. In the sere brown turf cropped out here and there the spidery violet blossoms of a little Iris that made the effect of a tattered crocus; there were also various vetchlets, and a claw-leaved fragrant violet that proves our old friend *Viola pinnata*, which you by no means need come so far to see. At the bottom I packed in again and was borne up the river-flats towards Tsin-jô, over alluvial levels pink with peach-blossom. The last day of this stage is dull, however. Your way continues up the river; you cross it by a long frail bridge of straw and muck that sways and staggers as you are carried over its many-spanned expanse. After this you have another long stretch before, at last, far ahead you see (after one false alarm raised by a gate-tower in the distance that proves the gate of nothing at all) the neat, clean-looking, battlemented walls of Tsin-jô in the near distance, amid a haze of weeping willows bursting into green.

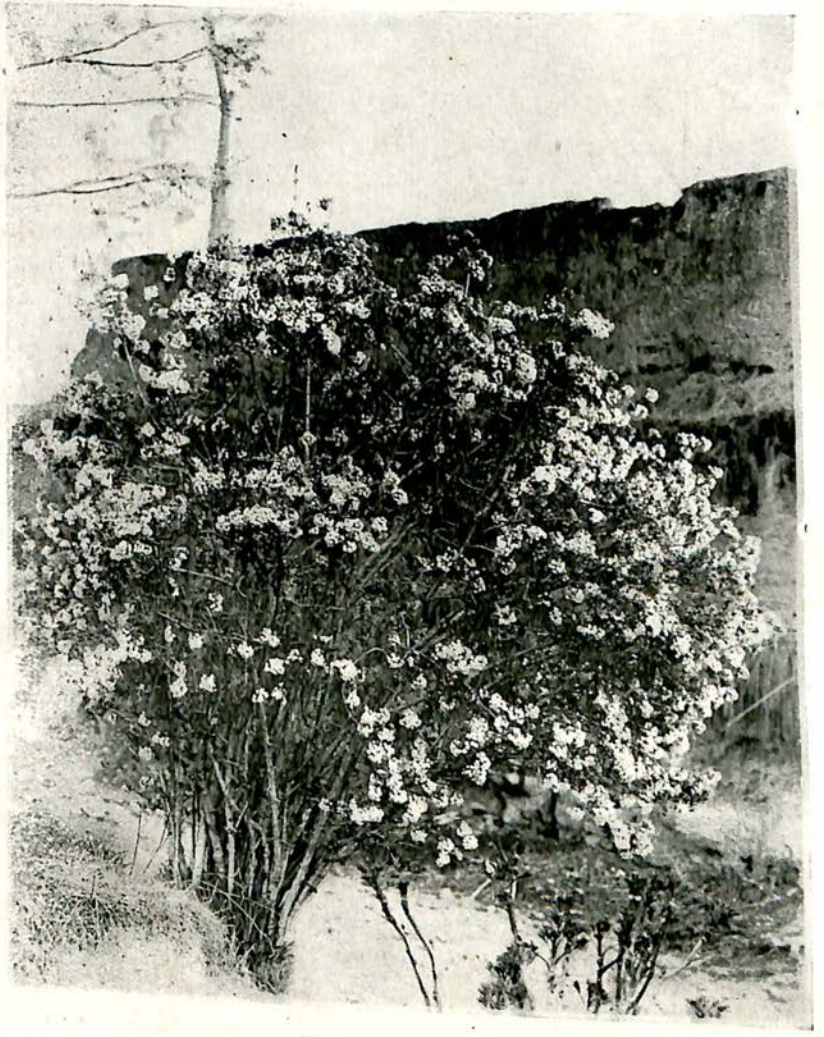
Tsin-jô is the most important town of South Kansu, and has the further prestige of being a very ancient Imperial Capital. Amid its groves it sits in the wide and fertile bed of the Wei Hor River, protected in front

and behind by the invariable high downs of loess. It is a warm, luxuriant little place of many winding streets, with a gay air of prosperity about it, and possesses (though I never trusted myself near it) a famous curiosity shop, frequented by virtuosi from all over China. It was more important to us as the end of our first piece of journey, as the termination of our contract with the mules from Sian, and with the chair. The mulemen, however, so much disliked and dreaded the prospect of returning to Sian, that they were very ready to sign on for a new stretch of road, though to our horror we now discovered that the elusive city of Kiai-jô is not some five days on, as we had hoped, but a solid nine or ten at the least, and over untrodden tracks at that, lone bypaths in the hills, where food is rare and accommodation inferior. No more frequent little eating-shops along the way for the men to refresh at, but wild and unknown roads through the devious sinuosities of the downs. This, indeed, is the secret of Kiai-jô's power, and of its exceedingly evil reputation. It is the worst-famed town in China, and even in far Peking is always being talked of, by the various and baffling pronunciations of its name, in connection with seditions and outbreaks. For it is quite remote from the world, as hard of approach from Szechwan as from Kansu, protected from the outer world by barriers of gaunt and naked hills, through which wind only a few difficult tracks along the cliffs of the ghostly ravines. Thus it becomes a centre for all the rascality of the Empire, for plot-hatching Elder Brothers, and all robbers and murderers who have made their own country too hot to hold them. To Kiai-jô they all betake themselves, and the town has been a hotbed of crime and rebellion from time immemorial. The track we shall traverse,

the sole practicable approaches to the place, will give you, if I can manage it, a very fair notion of its immunity from law and order. The district is unknown and undescribed indeed, and so are the stages of the road. I shall make no apology, therefore, for leading you more by detail from Tsin-jô to Kiai-jô, and on down the line.

On the twelfth of April we took the road again, and wound away over bare loess downs to the crumbling little hamlet of New Family Inn,* where for the first time we had difficulty in securing a lodging, so utterly unknown are Europeans down this stretch of road, primitive and lonely, on the way to nowhere, at least to no place where reputable people go. Soon, however, all had settled down. By paying ready cash for eggs we proved our solvency, and were allowed charcoal, previously denied; rooms were swept and garnished, old women, hens, and buggy rags cleared out, and preparations made for such unheard-of occurrences as guests. And here, in the garden-closes, hedged in by walls of loess, *Viburnum fragrans* for the first time appeared to us, amid a cloud of white and rosy blossom of plum and apricot and quince and peach. The next day's stage was brief and dull, down the slow levels of a river-bed to another little village, where our reception was yet more unfriendly than that of the day before, and its landlord positively impudent until recalled to sense by a manifestation of firmness. The next day was better, and the country less actively uninteresting. We went up along the winding course of a river between rocky mountain slopes that descended in screes to the grassy flats beside the stream, until I was dimly reminded of the Chiabotta del Pra; there were lateral valleys of sward, too, quite alpine in their

* Shin-ja-tien.



VIBURNUM FRAGRANS

effect. Up and down we went between the hills, now all shrouded in clouds of pink or pearly blossom, and embowered in the green of young willows, till in the early afternoon we arrived in the walled city of West River.*

Dense crowds gathered to witness our disembarkation at the inn outside the wall; so, lest trouble should arise, I assumed as impassive a magnificence of deportment as I could, and with blank unseeing face was borne through the mob into the narrow yard, and there at once passed into seclusion in my room, according to the proper custom for Chinese dignitaries on the road, whose importance is gauged by the difficulty of seeing them, and their marmoreal haughtiness when seen. My own imperial demeanour had its due effect: even the Yamun, in response to our cards, sent down a lavish present of eggs and chickens and candles like fat crimson carrots on sticks. I wanted to make a return, but the Mafu would not have this, declaring that the Lao-ya here was so small that our mere acceptance of his offerings was condescension enough on our part and to spare. Alas that this pleasant custom of exchanging presents has passed away in China! This was the solitary occasion on which I was so greeted, and often did I sigh for the golden days of old, when the riches of the East were poured forth for the accredited traveller, and all he had to give in return was some cheap Geneva watch or gimcrack of a looking-glass. Now all this is changed: presents have ceased to be passed, and the rivers of champagne that apparently flowed for the early Russian travellers are dried up for ever. Even watches to-day are at a discount, and the remotest Abbot in the wilds of Tibet knows what is what, and corrugates his nose at even a silver one.

* Shi-hor.

The next stage, of April 16, is an important date in botanical history, as marking the first discovery of *Viburnum fragrans* as a wild plant. The weather was dark and dull. We wound along a dull ascent between approaching mountains. Only the increasing ruggedness of the valleys cheered me, and the beauty of the wild plums and apricots in shades of white and pink making nebulous blurs of colour on the sere hillsides. Shallow scrub and coppice descended here to the track-side, and here we came on the Viburnum, at first isolated and suspicious, but soon in such quantity and such situations that one could no longer doubt that here this most glorious of flowering shrubs is genuinely indigenous. Its place of origin had long been in doubt, though all over North China it is probably the best-beloved and most universal of garden plants; so that there was real satisfaction in thus having traced it to its home, in the wild hills immediately to the south of Shi-hor and probably elsewhere in this narrow belt, though after this day we never set eyes on it again in nature. In gardens, indeed, it accompanied us wherever we went, and my last dim fear that it might be tender, or at all events require drastic summer ripening, were finally dissipated when in my second season I saw it in full glory at the very feet of the Da Tung Alps, in the cottage gardens of Weston-of-the-Pass, so high and cold a situation of that cold bleak region that even corn will not ripen there, except, perhaps, in one season out of three. In cultivation I dare to foretell it will give no trouble, then, either as to aspect or treatment in any nutritious loam. May it soon yield us the secular glory of the superb bushes that it makes in the yards of the Prince of Jo-ni or the great Green Temple at Lanchow—gracious arching masses, ten feet high and more across,

whose naked boughs in spring before the foliage become one blaze of soft pink lilac-spikelets, breathing an intense fragrance of heliotrope. The white form, indeed, is pure and lovely as the best of forced white lilac, but my own heart goes out yet more specially perhaps to the commoner pink type, whose blushing stars glister as if built of crystals, after the pleasant fashion of so many spring flowers, which is shared only, among summer ones, by the gross fleshliness of Begonias. Nor, when the flowers are gone and the delicate foliage developed, is the work of Viburnum finished. For now appear the glowing glossy scarlet fruits, hanging all over the bush in pendent clusters of jewel-work; these you eat with avidity and good result, so long as you remember to throw away the unwholesome kernel.

Down a succession of rocky gorges we now proceeded. The Viburnum gradually ceased, but instead the sturdy, glossy Daphne grew more and more common, and its tight domes of lucent foliage more densely crowned with heads of pale pink flowers that always seemed to me to smell especially sweet towards the later afternoon, and to be comparatively silent in the morning. It was an austere and delightful set of scenes: little pines were dotted in patches on the gentler slopes, and one grim range of alps after another would loom up overhead and pass. There was one, up at a valley's end, which reminded me of the culminating ridge of the Heu Thal. At last the day's delightful work concluded in a most charming little poplar-embowered village* at the junction of four alpine glens, with steep conical mountains all round as in a picture, some of them peppered with pines, and some of them clothed up their cooler face with

* Shih jah Gwan.

woodland; while at the summit of the barest stood a neat castle, led up to by a typical alpine zigzag.

Here we found friendly people and an inn with a noble guest-room, high and vast, with plaited roof as black as burnished ebony from the smoke of many years. The day still left time for exploration, so off we went to explore a coppiced hillside just opposite. The elevation of these districts is, of course, nowhere near sufficient for an alpine flora: four or five thousand feet count for nothing in Western China, where not a single European peak would attain the snowline, so far as I can ascertain, and where the alpine zone can hardly be said to begin till you have reached an altitude at which our own high-alpine ends in the final barren rocks and everlasting ice of the European summits. But these lower foothills have their pleasant plants; and here we found the Daphne in rich abundance, and a beautiful white Epimedium with flowers like small snowy butterflies aflutter loosely up the long spike, and a golden-flowered Senecio like a wee one-stemmed Dahlia, and the rosetted cushion of a biennial or monocarpic little Gentian, spreading out in tartlets of the most brilliant azure blossom, suggesting those of *G. pyrenaica*, but of perfect blueness, and very elegant with ten-lobed-looking stars.

All these, indeed, we may come to scorn as commonplaces, for all of them are the most abundant weeds over the dry subalpine regions of South-Western Kansu; but the first appearance of such beauties calls out a very different emotion from their last; and the intense joy of that afternoon made me for the first time realise the oppression of those many dull and flowerless days now lying behind us. So at length we leisurely descended from that wooded slope with our load of new

delights, and the complacent evening was further cheered by the sight of a local loaf, a thing like a dense warty-looking dish from some long-forgotten dynasty, or the carapace of a turtle, or a fossilised mushroom-hat of gigantic size, as toothsome as a slice of stalagmite and as hard as the nether millstone. After which Purdom rewarded the extra-special friendliness of the family by going into the kitchen and canvassing their various ailments. My own line, on such occasions, could only, at this stage of my travels, be that of smiling sympathy; but fortunately he was able always to take the more positive part. The foreigner in China is, in fact, universally expected to act as healer, and the largest medicine-chest will hardly hold out against the popular demand for calomel and rhubarb and such-like obvious remedies, which are all that one can usually dare prescribe for the many vague and complicated ailments with which one is confronted at every turn. The problem is yet further complicated by the common habit of bringing you other people's diseases by hearsay for you to deal with; it is not easy to cope with the pains that somebody declares somebody else at ten miles distance is enduring, or thinks they are enduring, or thinks they ought to be enduring.

I had imagined that here I might make myself useful by arranging our flowers for the press, but was soon shown the perfect passivity which alone is considered appropriate to a Chinese "Dârĕn," by the Mafu, who took them from me with a calm firm hand, and dealt with them himself in such a way as cured me for ever of the fancy that I could dry flowers, an art on which, in former days, I had rather piqued myself. But nothing can compare with the untiring expert neatness of the Chinese; and after I had once seen the Mafu at his task

I left the business wholly in his hands from that time forth. In due course, though, even he became too great for the business, and the timid Go-go, who at present bulged his eyes with terror and almost wept each time he handed one a plate, became erelong the flower-drier in chief. It used to be my unfailing joy to watch him exquisitely toiling at his art, with a patient minute care of which no European botanist has any notion, taking the frail poppy-blooms, for instance, and arranging little tabs of blotting-paper under each several petal, so that each should dry separately and keep its shape and colour perfectly, and combine to present one in the end with a flower as living and lovely as if it still were flaunting in the field. For one of the most attractive features of Chinese as servants is their unfailing keenness to collaborate. If you offer them the smallest chance of a share in your work they seize it eagerly and grow as deeply interested as yourself. Shut them out from it, and they turn cold and bored and useless, as might reasonably be expected. I have met, indeed, a botanist who made exactly the contrary criticism, and complained that his Chinese servants were of no assistance in his work; but he was a man who never concealed his acute dislike for the people and the country and everything it contained. He regularly excluded his men accordingly from any part in his confidence or enthusiasm, and then blamed them excessively for not sharing it.

On sounder lines, however, it is the easiest thing in the world to make the Chinese most eager assistants, not only among your staff, but all along the road. No Chinese can see you doing anything, without wanting to come and watch how you do it, and, in a few minutes, wanting to do it too. A little friendliness, a bit of

explanation, gives him a community of interest with yourself, and in a little while you probably have a workman whose skill is greater than your own in your own job, and whose enthusiasm is no less. I find it hard to believe that among European peasants, stupefied by their alps, you would ever find the untiring energy, the art and neatness, the genuine zeal that wild Tibetan herdboys or a simple muleteer from Shansi, like the Go-go, can be got to deploy on so unknown and unprofitable a job as the collecting and drying of alpine flowers, which have to be sought in remote and difficult places, at the cost of much hard walking and climbing, in haunted regions high up, where of his own accord he would never think of venturing. No investment in the world, in fact, pays better than a little humanity with your Chinese servants.

The next day's journey bore us upwards in torrents of rain, out of that happy valley towards the heights of the downs above, under dark cliffs beneath whose ledges were tucked great coffins with stones piled on the lids to keep off wolves and leopards, at least until their occupants are so far forgotten as to make the spoiling of the grave no longer a matter of concern to anybody. These exposed coffins, huge as arks, and in varying degrees of solid splendour from the very solid chests of the rich to the thin poor planking of the pauper, are a notable feature in all this region; you see them everywhere, in the oddest places, wherever the Augurers of Wind and Water have indicated an auspicious spot for their lodgment. Usually they are in grottoes and cavities in the faces of the cliffs, or in their ledges; but often merely perched upon the slopes, propped up with stones or poised upon a pinnacle; and there they apparently stay until at last they crack and gape and

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fall asunder, and the white bones litter the ground, grown dull and porous with the changes of seasons and weather. This fact would not necessarily of itself conflict with the accepted theory that such coffins are only left out in the open until the relations of their dead inmate have means and leisure to take them back to the dead man's own province; while the natives of the district themselves find prompt and permanent sepulture beneath the family mound or in the family enclosure of many mounds, somewhere in the coppiced cemetery outside the village. But it seems odd that so many wealthy strangers should lie thus long away from their kith and kin in just this particular stretch of country. It is true that these regions are poor and without big towns; so that there is a lack of those big guild-temples, in which, in the cities and wealthier districts, the coffins of strangers are honourably stored by hundreds until taken back at last to their own places. Yet the multitude of such exposed coffins along all the roads of this extreme south-west corner of Kansu is remarkable; and I find it no less so that only here did I see them, that their range begins at this point, extends right along the valley of the Blackwater, and ceases abruptly and finally some two days north of Siku.

It was a stage of ups and downs, over five small passes from which the distant ranges were all hidden in banks of cloud. They evidently increased in height as we advanced, but the fells themselves were too wholly cultivated; and nothing occurred in flower but the purple Anemone, now becoming rare and soon to cease. Here and there cascades came gushing down over the undercut ledges of the little cliff-outcrops; the smooth projecting lips and modulations of the rock,

so exactly like that formation of cement familiar at Chelsea under the name of Pulhamite, gave these spouts precisely the effect of sham waterfalls in the rock-gardens of the very rich. All over the cooler slopes abounded wide masses of *Iris tectorum*, peculiar, in my experience, to the low ranges of South Kansu, but there abundant. Otherwise the day was not fertile of flowers, and at last I was glad to descend the last slope upon Little Spring,* lying very cosily in a vale under foothills all waved with fields of corn, and backed by rugged dark ranges just like the Langdales above Grasmere; while, on the side from which we had descended, the undulations were softer, red-soiled, and very richly emerald under the darkling sky, with here and there a sombre ridge peering over from above. Those who gape and gasp over the foolish traditions of the Flannel-Flower may be thrilled to learn that already, and all over Kansu, along the loess of the very tracksides the Edelweiss abounds in typical form, though by no means so splendid as the forms that it develops at higher elevations in the flower-fields of the Tibetan Alps. Here, in these dull plebeian situations, it is as common, dull and plebeian a plant as on the grassy lawns of the European ranges.

The morrow, the eighteenth of April, was another red-letter day, in spite of the fact that we had been told that our road was to be "ping"—that is, flat. But "ping," in Chinese road-language, stands for general ease and security and soundness of track; never be surprised, then, if a "ping-lu" takes you coiling over a mountain. So it was in this case, and hardly had we begun to ascend when occurred the first and most brilliant adventure of the stage. For in the stretches of turf that had here and there escaped the harrow

* Hsiao, Chuang dz'.

shone like living sunlight patches of a radiant little golden-yellow ground Daphne, with flowers so much larger than are usual in the race that they looked like miniature jasmines lying in a neat huddle on the floor. In tight tuffets and mats it nestled to the ground, and the gleaming lemon-gold of it seemed the very manifestation of spring and promise. Nor was the thought a delusion, for this little beauty proves not only a new species, but the type of a new race, cousin to Daphne and Stellera, but distinguished now as Farreria. In ardour we leapt upon it and collected specimens. The rootstock is a strange bulbous woody trunk most difficult to negotiate. Even this, though, we secured, and got a few young specimens to pot up and take along with us on the remote chance of their surviving. Along the crest of that high down we walked in ecstasy from flame-plot to flame-plot. A one-leaved Orchis here shot up a purple spire, and the small blue Gentian was now growing more abundant and more beautiful. Then and there we got out the lesser travelling-press and arranged our finds, despising the difficulties of the circumstances that set our sober sheets of blotting-paper careering and capering before the wind like mænads, flapping and floundering down the path with the servants in pursuit.

Long and far and very beautiful was the descent along the face of the down. At one point there was a little tangled grave-coppice, that was one solid sheet of azure blue with that lovely Lithospermum which imitates patches of fallen sky in the copses of Japan, and which for many years I dreamed of as *L. erythrorrhizon*, until at last I learned that the famous Little Forget-me-not of Japanese art and romance is but a poor and dowdy thing by comparison with its cousin,

STELLERA SP. (PINK AND VERY SWEET)

this overpowering *L. japonicum*. The Sapphire Lungwort is most glorious in some of the woods of Dorset. Diminish its height, and magnify its flowers to twice their size, figure them as of the most violent pure azure, and you will have no such poor notion of *L. japonicum* and what it looks like filling the open glades and bushy places. Here, to make its effect yet more entrancing, it was tangled up with drifts of Edelweiss, in jungles of silver-grey stars amid that firmament of blue, as beautiful a picture as any I have seen in all the hills I have trodden.

It was hard to tear oneself away, but onwards we must go, descending the ridges of the fell. Suddenly upon the brink of a crumbling cliff I heard Purdom give the alarm; and joining him, was driven frantic by the most beautiful of small bushes that sprouted inaccessible from its face. It was our first sight of *Dipelta elegans*, that rivals *Viburnum fragrans* in grace of habit and the charm of its abundant blossom. Here it was small and starved and in exile on that barren hot wall, far from the cool Tibetan copses where it glories. Even so it made one jump to see it, its boughs bending beneath their burden of swollen-throated five-lipped bells of softest pearly white or faintest shell-pink, with a reticulation on the lower lip of what seemed like orange velvet. It is, in fact, like a transfigured Weigela (that only the learned and correct will be persuaded nowadays to call Diervilla as they should); but no Weigela of our gardens can convey to you the grace, the superabundance of beauty and blossom, that always captivates your heart anew each time you see Dipelta meekly bowed beneath her burden of beauty.

All this is very true, but it got us no nearer, that day, to acquiring that bush. We tried every means

of descent, but none would answer. Our smooth nailless soles slithered on the loess walls as if on ice; no rope was at hand, and the drop below discouraged rashness. But the more we looked the more we longed. A superstitious importance attaches to the possession of any first specimen one comes across of some remarkable species. It is all very well to remind oneself of the cold fact that the first specimen is never going to be the last, nor at all likely to be the best, but is, on the contrary, only an outlying advance-guard of the plant's main abundance. Considerations such as these avail nothing against one's yearning to hold that first specimen in one's hands and savour its full loveliness; nor can one ever get free of a superstitious fear that after all that first specimen *might* be the one and only. So we hovered and experimented uneasily along that cliff for foothold, but with no results for our swinking and sweating; until along came a peasant, to whom we immediately indicated the bush and asked if he could get it. He peered over. Our hearts beat high. "Yuni," he placidly assented, and slipped over the edge and down the wall like a fly, secure in the grip of naked mobile toes and the living leather of his feet. Another moment and the Dipelta was ours, and was being delicately unfolded between the pages of the blotting-paper. It subsequently, in its full splendour, gave us many hours of solemn rapture in its Tibetan home. But not the utmost glory of a plant in its full development can afford quite the same razor-edged ecstasy as the moment when you see it for the first time, and for the first time devour its loveliness with eyes and nose and finger-tips.

Now the track was winding downwards towards a valley far below, in which flowed a snow-green river

among grey shingle-stretches, exactly as if you were looking down upon the Arc at Termignon, deep under the mountains. Down and down we tramped, until at last in the levels of the river we came into a charming little village among trees, thriving on the mills through which the water is diverted by several runnels all of a row. Across the stream we proceeded, and up the mountain on the other side, only arrested by a flaring mass of purple glimpsed among the tangles at the slope's foot, that proved the prevailing masses of Iris in this country to be *I. tectorum* indeed; here, in this hot sheltered corner, more precocious in flower than elsewhere. Steeply the path ascended between a scant boscage of white Clematis flopping over the bushes, while *Rosa Banksiæ* mounded itself up in heaps of snow, and cast far and wide its too tenacious branches laden with milky bunches, and diffusing a scent which always drives me perfectly wild with drunken rapture, as cats, they say, are crazed with catnip. The Polyanthus Narcissus, indeed, has a sharp and edgy deliciousness almost beyond bearing, but the mingled scent of wine and violets and pure warm sweetness which is the breath of *Rosa Banksiæ* is for me almost more impossible to endure with any decent composure. It fills one with yearning and a bursting pain of pleasure. Soon, however, we were above the level of these seductive sirens, climbing upon moorish open fell, now blue with clumped masses of *Iris ensata*. It coloured all the hill-side, and round some little cottages that we passed it was so thick and drifted in the sward that it seemed like some paradoxical sweep of sapphire daffodils in a Westmorland orchard, the general habit and grouping and disposition of the plants were so very much the same.

Coppice and burdened bushes of Dipelta reappeared

towards the summit, and then we emerged upon the high crest, when more and higher ranges came into sight, away and away into the distance, but still with no sign of snow or alpine heights. The descent was again long and far and lovely. A very, very wee Gentian carpeted the ground here and there, and the more arid stretches were so dense with the stars of a sprawling small forget-me-not as to glow blue; but otherwise the walk afforded no novelty. So at last I decided to resume the chair, and sat awhile to wait for it, looking out over the laps and folds of green culture away below to another river in their depths that increased the whole resemblance of this scene also to the Valley of the Arc, though much richer and on a vaster scale. Finally the chair arrived, and for many a mile onward we were borne up the course of the stream beneath overhanging cliffs, until the stage concluded in the tiny village of Flat Road, where the inn-porch, indeed, gave promise from afar of good quarters, but of nothing like the palace-hall I was carried to, up through two small yards with latticed, fretted, second-story galleries above, and friendly pleasant people waiting to welcome me below.

The next day gave us less interesting ground, though beautiful in itself, and seen in the advantages of a glorious day. We diligently persisted along the river, pursuing its innumerable windings among mountain gorges. These, however, were too highly cultivated in shelves of grain for any horticultural hope, and there was only one moment of interest in that day's stage. For at one point, down in the shingles of the river-bed, a crowded fair was raging, and above, on the hillside, was coppice of some strange shrub, whose foliage seemed to be glossy beneath, as to the rufflings of the wind each bush

waved a simultaneous show of white-looking tips. I took it at first for a poplar, and it was not till the chair had arrived beneath the slope that I realised that all woodland was one drift of Pearlbushes in full flower, and the undulating shimmer of white the simultaneous ripple of their blossom. So up the steeps I furiously ran, getting thorns into my slippered soles from the dead spines of barberries lying all about; and secured a sheaf of the noble branches, with each twig ending in its flight of moony white blooms. After which the fair enjoyed the unusual sight of the foreign lord squatting on the ground, arranging flowers between sheets of blotting-paper. This side-show might have been even excessively appreciated had it not been for the Mafu, who leapt upon the pressing throngs with the sudden yells of a gorilla gone insane, and put them to flight in roars of laughter.

After a very long stage we reached our haven at the Street of Happy Sons,* a tiny place, as pretty as are all these little valley-villages, and with a promise of nobler rugged ridges rising behind, while in front, across the beck, rose a long high hillside all copsed and wooded and blurred with promise, illuminated here and there with the tender pink of Pyrus or Dipelta. In the quiet evening we crossed the stream and ascended the woodland by different paths. My own object was a specially rosy tree of Pyrus, to which I at last attained toilsomely through the jungle, delayed only by one other new beauty, a wild-rose just beginning to break out in arching sprays of golden-yellow blossom. A lady-slipper was peering up, indeed, amid the brushwood, but it was as yet too undeveloped to be made out; it had, though, several buds to the stem, and thus differed from all

* Fu-erh-Gai.

those with which I came in contact later on. So I sat at last and rested, gazing down the steep loess tracks to the little village at my feet, so comfortable and pleasant-looking in its grove of poplars, till my eye was caught by certain white objects farther along the hill-side, that were clearly too big by far to be flowers, yet must certainly be investigated, if only to find out what clots of white wool, or yet whiter paper, surely, could be doing in the wild coppice, perked up here and there above the small-fry of little barberries and so forth. Probably they had some religious meaning. I would see.

Through the foaming shallows of the copse I plunged, and soon was holding my breath with growing excitement as I neared my goal, and it became more and more certain that I was setting eyes on *Pæonia Moutan* as a wild plant. The event itself justified enthusiasm, but all considerations of botanical geography vanish from one's mind in the first contemplation of that amazing flower, the most overpoweringly superb of hardy shrubs. Here in the brushwood it grew up tall and slender and straight, in two or three unbranching shoots, each one of which carried at the top, elegantly balancing, that single enormous blossom, waved and crimped into the boldest grace of line, of absolute pure white, with featherings of deepest maroon radiating at the base of the petals from the boss of golden fluff at the flower's heart. Above the sere and thorny scrub the snowy beauties poise and hover, and the breath of them went out upon the twilight as sweet as any rose. For a long time I remained in worship, and returned downwards at last in the dusk in high contentment, to find that Purdom's only other record from his higher ascent was spiteful and hunchy *Ilex Pernyi*, abundant in the upper coppice of these comparatively dry regions.

As for the Peony, its home has long been a problem of botanists. Though it has been cultivated for countless ages in all the gardens of the Far East, it was long before it could be traced to its original *point de départ*. There is, it is true, a certain Chinese mountain called Peony Mountain, and it seemed probable that this was so called because there either were peonies on it, or at some time had been. Purdom's earlier research, however, had shown that not only was there no present trace of peonies there whatever, but that not even in the memory of the oldest inhabitant was there any hint of peonies ever having been seen there; one and all confessed their ignorance as to why the hill should have been called Peony Mountain. In point of fact, it is probably European reasoning that has led us astray, and Peony Mountain most likely takes its name from some much less obvious cause, now undiscoverable. Perhaps it was thought to look like a peony, or confusion has arisen round its Chinese character. In any case, no investigations in Shensi brought wild tree-peonies to view, and it was not till Purdom visited the foothills of the Min San in 1911 that at last the Moutan was discovered in its original cradle. But along the upper reaches of the Blackwater its form is that with flowers of dark and rich magenta-crimson; occurring again here, along the extreme southern fringe of Kansu, it is always of the purest white. No doubt different districts, when China is yet farther searched, may reveal yet other divergences of colour.

I wish I might one day set eyes on the wild original of that marvellous variety which is forced so freely for the Chinese market, and is sold for extravagant sums at mid-January in Peking. It is like the one we call Reine Elisabeth, which is still the most gorgeous

of all tree-peonies in point of colour, and is very likely Reine Elisabeth herself in the country of her birth; anyhow you have to keep a tight grip of your pockets when you enter one of the big sunken lean-to's, papered with white, which are the Chinese flower-shops, and see before you a glowing stretch of purest, most brilliant salmon-pink, the huge blossoms, like the chalices of the Magnolias close by, being carefully tied in with sashes, as if they were on their way to a Chelsea show. The bushes themselves are dwarf and sturdy; the naked roots are pulled up and sent down by bales to Peking, and immediately potted up in jardinières, to bloom a few weeks later; and after that, presumably, to die. For tree-peonies at all times are no friends to change or removal; it is not conceivable that they should condone the brutality of the Peking market-gardener's processes. But China continues its immense demand for Moutans, and the supply continues inexhaustible, though the most cherished forms are rare and do not often appear on the market. A black one is talked of, and is of an intensely dark maroon; green and blue ones are almost certainly Chimæras, such as Chinese imagination likes to invent as the special treasure of some lonely monastery far away in the sands of Shin-jang or the desolate moorlands of the Koko-nor. The most precious of all is the so-called yellow, which merely indulges in a faint greenery-yallery flush spreading from the base among the tumbled whiteness of the petals.

The Moutan is *par excellence* the national flower of China, indeed, in every form: paupers, prelates, and Emperors affect its charms, and there is hardly a house or an abbey up the Border without its bush or two of Tree Peony; while the Imperial Palaces revel in rows

upon rows of them arranged in narrow shallow terraces, each just wide enough for a single line of plants, and piled up one behind another till the effect of that towering long bank all ablaze with blossom must surpass the wildest imagination of the show-bench, in something of the same style. I cannot but feel that in similar raised terraces the peonies might find better drainage and kindlier conditions in England, where at present they still remain more loyally obedient to the wishes of their late Imperial mistress than do her other special favourites, the Palace doglings, one of whose special points, as laid down by Her Majesty's own hand, was that they should "bite the foreign devils instantly." To the cool damp climate of many parts of England the Chinese and Japanese Moutans still remain as hostile as the most exclusive of Empresses could desire; but the Palace dogs have accepted a new life much more readily, and take as kindly to a comfortable English cook as ever to court life in the now-forgotten days when whole troops of them went ambling up and down along the marble-railed groves of the Summer Palace in attendance on their mistress; even as in yet older days, before they came as an Imperial present to the Emperors of China, they ambled up and down yet other palace terraces beside the Bosphorus, on the skirts of Theodora or Theophano.

CHAPTER VI

ROUND THE HEEL OF KANSU

In these regions the character of the country is changing. The face of Southern and Central Kansu is one vast corrugation of those tedious loess downs, till the hunter after wild mountain-lands grows every day more sick with the inexhaustible energy of the Chinese cultivator that has thus bared all the world for his needs, and left no standing-room anywhere for wild beast or tree. But the fringes of the province are very different. Long as we have been winding among hills, and little as the general character seems to have changed, yet the alteration, though slow, has been constant; its effects grow increasingly evident, and now we are actually drawing near the edge of what one can only call the land of sudden contrasts. A hot summer and a coldish winter prevail in South Kansu; the rainfall is well distributed, and the loess downs do not find it difficult to produce their crops. But the conditions become much more extreme when at last you meet the high ranges descending from Tibet. Here you suddenly come upon the conditions of the desert in combination with those of the Alps. Deep in their beds flow the big rivers, the Blackwater, the Whitewater, the Hwang Hor, the Mekong, the Salwen, the Yangdze; their zone is of a torrid droughtiness impossible to imagine. Waterless, perpetually parched and thirsty (for the alps

THE DRUM TOWER OF THE SUMMER PALACE

above take all the rain they bring to birth), those barren slopes bear only a typically desert flora, thorny hedgehogs of plants, dry dust-coloured growths of the burning sand and loess. And then from this you ascend straight and immediately to the heights; and within four hours or so of leaving the river-levels are luxuriating in cool alpine conditions and mountain-forests and lawns of flowers as alpine as the flower-fields of the Mont Cenis or the Rolle Pass. In fact, I can best paint to you the violent diversity of the two climates here by saying that the ascent of a high peak above the Blackwater Valley is as if you could climb straight up from the burning rocks of Aden to the clear lake that mirrors Mont Lamet.

The next day's journey, indeed, offered no sign of such developments. But though in itself dull, it stands out as having first given us a glimpse of the land of promise. We passed away from the high hills where the Peony shines above the coppice, and made along the course of the stream till it became a beck and then a tiny runnel. At one point we traversed a gorge of magnesian limestone, but afterwards remained on loess and conglomerate, with the unfolding fells still all terraced and tilled to their bare summits. Perpetually we mounted slowly, till suddenly we had reached the summit of the pass and all the westerly world lay unfolded in a moment before us. It was a vast wide prospect indeed, over the rippling lines of the long Tibetan ranges; and there, in the south and not so many days away, a huge barrier-wall of mountain, topped with violet cloud-banks, and profusely streaked with threads of snow down its almost vertical walls. And beyond this, again, dimly glimpsed amid the clouds, were other greater snowfields. It was the beginning of the begin-

ning; and in a rapture of anticipation after all those many weeks of loess and culture I wound my way solemnly along the down, and deep into the wide dry river-plain at its feet, where little hamlets crouched amid the vivid green of willow and poplar. I could hardly notice my golden Ground Daphne here recurring in rather poorer mats over the naked face of the fell. My satisfaction continued, too, when the plain was reached, for, instead of turning away from the mountains, as is too often the perverse way of paths, we headed straight towards them, and they remained beautifully visible ahead of us to our stage at Yao Village, where we found a most delightful little clean whitewashed room, brand-new, with delicate fresh woodwork, and dried lotus-blooms in a pot, and two stiff and stately armchairs, and a long red-lacquered table set between them. It was a cheerful evening for us in such unwonted luxury, with the mountains now heaving into sight, and with the morrow due to bring us to Kiai-jô, the end of this the third section of the journey.

Under a stormy sky the rugged, earthy hills were livid in rosy blue as we advanced, and soon we turned aside out of their sight into a deep and hideously savage ravine by which alone it seems that Kiai-jô is possible of approach from the north. But before we got into the defile we found our way down the river valley blocked with a practically unbroken stream of people. Some holy festival was evidently in process at some shrine away behind us up the road. Ladies of quality had donned their finest silks, and were being convoyed along on ponies by their bands of retainers; the common folk trudged afoot; strings of donkeys laden with coffin-planks yet further impeded our way; and every now and then a little divinity would come along

at a run, borne in a small gay palanquin of his own with silken curtains, and a gong being beaten behind to warn the world that he was on his way, no doubt, to pay his visit to the superior deity who was evidently that day being at home to heaven and earth. Austere or bland the images looked out impassively, and the Go-go was in a continual course of giggles.

For the robust good sense of the Go-go's simplicity found nothing in all his travels a more inexhaustible fund of amusement than the various manifestations of piety he met with, whether it might be small gods taking a day off, or the wine-veiled litanies of Abbot Squinteyes, or the vociferous caperings of a Chinese exorcism, or missionaries chanting dismal psalms in the basement, accompanied by the meat-woman and the cook, to an obbligato of the baby's yells upstairs. At all and sundry the Go-go would convulsively explode; and, indeed, towards the end of his travels developed such trust in laughter as a panacea that he became unable to answer the simplest and soberest question without wriggling spurts of merriment.

The defile into which we now turned off proved dauntingly vast, devious, and depressing. First of all the track proceeds in and out and up and down in the bed of the stream; then, mounting, it winds about round deep gullies and over gaunt and ghastly stone-falls, often propped out on frail planks at vertiginous heights above the stream of bright orange-coloured mud far down below in the cavernous depths of the enclosing walls. The place might have been the entrance to Avernus, it was so lifeless and desolate; the slopes were all barren and blasted as if by fire. Here and there, like the memory of a pale flame, rose up the dead-looking spikes of an Asphodel, whose very self or first cousin I

had last seen on the Barrow of the Dead at Marathon. Otherwise, those torn and riven sides of the ravine had as little life as a Pompeian loaf; dusty yellow and grey was all its colouring, except where some outcrop of coal contributes dismal stretches of grime.

It is no commodious road, this, for armies and the forces of law and order. As easily may a camel go through a needle's eye. The narrow track, serpentining along the face of the cliffs, offers little ease in itself, but as often as not it is carved in the rotten wall of the rock itself, or built out in these galleries that it seems as if a touch would dislodge. There is no question here of horse or chair; you must make your own way as best you can up and down the slithering and crumbling little rocky ascents and declivities of the path as it rounds the ribs of shaly cliffs in the gloom of the gorge, or down rickety stairs in rounded marblish outcrops, or along the brinks of a pebbly conglomerate. One flower alone here lit the obscurity: it was a little bush, dusty and soft and grey as fitted the place, flopping only from the sheerest walls of the cliff, and now rejoicing the eye with bunches of bright pink stars that shone like sparks on those austere and ruinated crags, and, when looked at close, recalled some small Bouvardia with blossoms built of crystals. And even this has but this one moment of unsuitable beauty in which it shines like a jewel in the arid earhole of a skull; for the rest of the time it is as ashen in look as the precipice it springs from in that sere and torrid region.*

Kiai-jô lies beyond the gloom of the defile, out immediately beyond it in the valley-plain of the Black-water, with high and thirsty hills on the far side. You begin to divine the town ahead of you as you emerge

* *Buddleia Purdomii*, sp. *nova*.

from the gloom of the gorge into the open sunlight where four valleys meet. Purdom rode on ahead in anxiety about our reception in this busy hive of lawlessness and disorder, where anything might be expected to happen. There had even been anxiety about the pigtails of the "boys," in which they still persevered; for in such a place as this the possession or lack of a pigtail may easily involve the lack or continued possession of the head that wears it. Altogether, it was with a furbishing of arms and in a general atmosphere of precautions and wariness that we approached Kiai-jô. I do not find it easy, myself, to indulge preliminary suspicions against my own race of bipeds, which I obstinately believe to be more good than evil; but even I, as my chair debouched upon the levels of the Blackwater, began to wonder what reception we were going to meet. The first sign of life that occurred was a string of navvies in big gangs engaged in stamping down the ramparts of a handsome embankment that was being put up to keep out the floods of the Blackwater from the flats immediately round the town. They chanted and responded as they pounded and thumped: of me and my train they took no unfavourable notice. But hardly had we turned a corner, and come upon the town lurking in the security of its walls, than I felt a very different environment. Storm was abroad, and the crowded streets were suspiciously active. Kiai-jô, in fact, in spite of all tales of its decrepitude, proved a place of singular stir, business, prosperity and populousness. We could hardly move along the streets; something was evidently wrong. Purdom suddenly met me with the news. The local Octroi had tried to take the high hand with our chattels (which, under the flag of the Legation, are universally free in China

from these petty annoyances); there had been a row; somebody had been thumped by somebody else; the whole place was in a turmoil. My part was to preserve a blank and awful majesty amid the seething masses.

Accordingly I remembered Constantius II., who, on that long summer day of his triumphal entry into Milan, was never observed to make the slightest movement that could suggest he was a living being. In stark and stony splendour I was borne through the buzzing streets, and finally deposited on the floor in the outer yard of the Yamun. Imperial dignity was now more necessary than ever, from the very fact of being more difficult to achieve. While you are being carried shoulder-high above the crowd of lesser mortals it is comparatively easy to believe yourself a demi-god, and behave appropriately; indeed, while a good motor engenders in one a sort of fierce and Nietzschean arrogance, there is nothing like a sedan for inspiring one with an older, calmer sense of grandeur. But when the sedan is dumped on the floor amid a dense mob of spectators to whom one is as the most precious of raree-shows, the superiority of one's attitude is wholly destroyed, and it becomes really difficult to maintain the proper haughty impassivenesss of demeanour, with hundreds of eager and ill-disposed people pressing upon each other to bend down and peep in upon you. One is on a lower level, and thus at a serious disadvantage, commanding only a serried vista of legs, unimpressible objects. Nevertheless, while pourparlers proceeded in a furious hubbub, everybody talking at once as loud as they could, but Purdom loudest, I modelled my behaviour on an Easter Island image, and stared straight before me, seeing nothing and nobody. After a long

time of this I was relieved by Purdom's reappearance from the recesses of the Yamun courts; on his invitation from the Mandarin I alighted as pompously as I could, and as pompously we proceeded together up through the intermediate courts of justice, where criminals or suspects were kneeling for judgment before the bar in the midst of a dense crowd. At the back, and to one side, we came into the yard of the reception-rooms, and there were met by my first Chinese official, in the prescribed course of bows and smiles.

He was a duly charming personage, and with honeyed salutations he escorted us into the room and seated us on the proper chairs. Unfortunately, at this stage of my travels smiles were my only currency; I sat and sweetly simpered to every unintelligible sentence, desiring to convey an impression of urbanity that should atone for my utter ignorance of all the etiquette prescribed on these occasions. Fortunately, by this time, even in places so remote as Kiai-jô, the Governors recognise this lack in foreigners, and make allowances for it; yet Chinese official politeness is so elaborate, so minute, so rigidly laid down in all its details, that amid the intricacies of a Yamun conversation nearly all strangers grow afflicted with a maddening sense of their own ill-educated inadequacy, and take refuge in helpless fury or excessive gaiety, according as their several dispositions prompt. In this case, however, all went well, as it almost invariably does; for it is only those rare Chinese who have enjoyed the blessing of European "education" who have arrived at the pitch of enveloping the stranger in an atmosphere of sneers and covert contempt for his ignorance of a language and code of manners he has never been taught.

The Mandarin of Kiai-jô, poor soul, had no easy

seat. The turbulence of the town was beyond control by the scanty means he had at his disposal, despite the notorious difficulty of the spot; and yet worse things than spasmodic rebellions were at hand for him, if we had only known. Nevertheless, he made due arrangements for our entertainment and protection; the business of the Octroi was easily settled with apologies from the over-sedulous officials, and an inn for our accommodation, which had previously been unobtainable, was promptly set at our disposal by the Yamun's order—a customary exercise of power for which alone it is always worth while to pay the proper courtesies to the local Governor. So finally we were bidden to drink tea, that blessed Chinese formula for concluding an interview, for which one so often craves in Europe. In both hands, as politeness bids, we raised the covered cup to our lips, and then rose up to go, the Mandarin accompanying us from yard to yard, at each portal politely repressed with a show of friendly violence, and at each persisting in coming forward none the less to the next, until the point prescribed by etiquette for due leave-taking according to the visitor's rank has been attained, both parties, despite their flourishes, knowing perfectly well all the time exactly to which gate the visitor has a right to be escorted and the entertainer to abandon him. In this case the Governor gave us ample "face," obstinately conveying us himself down to the outermost entrance and through the Court of Sessions, where smart spanks were now heard juicily resounding on bare flesh, eliciting yelps and confessions. At the Great Gate we turned round for the last low bow of leave-talking, and then, through the surging crowds, proceeded comfortably to our inn, secure now in the majesty afforded by public official protection.

Our rooms were high and large, up at the back of the second courtyard, aromatic with hundreds of huge stacked bundles of dried medicine roots on their way to Central China. But not even yet had we rest. For now the whole population of the place came raging through the court in a dense stream for the next five hours, till one felt like Mr. Gladstone or Queen Victoria lying in state. At last, to give them full value for their trouble, we unfurled the big green tent in the central hall of our apartment, and there sat posed before the mob on the lines of a realistic group at Madame Tussaud's representing renowned travellers in their camp. The exhibition was a complete success; the crowds, if possible, redoubled, and we could certainly have taken quite a handsome sum at the doors. But it was not a friendly throng; the best that could be said for its curiosity was that it was frigid rather than actively malevolent. Nobody would enter into any dealings with us; corn and other necessaries were unobtainable, despite the Yamun's official sanction; and altogether this place quite lived up to its sinister reputation as a hotbed of trouble.

But at last, as evening drew on, the spectacle did grow stale, and the crowds melted away, leaving us alone; then, and not till then, did the well-disposed inhabitants dare to show us a friendliness which would have brought them into trouble had it been observed by some spy of the Lilies or Elder Brothers, leagues so democratically composed that you cannot tell what ragged and filthy coolie lurking by may not be one of their highest officials, issuing orders to the local Mandarins and Governors and Viceroys on pain of life or death. The corn, so long denied for money, was now sent in for love; and, released from the peril of prying

eyes, the people of the house began to accept our overtures. The stormy day, accordingly, closed in with a sense of tranquil triumph at having thus successfully established ourselves at so important a point of our travels, a place that a year ago had barely been a name to me.

But now the elusive Chagola, about which nobody had known anything all down the road, seemed even more remote than ever. It was necessary, it seemed, to go on for another four or five days down the Blackwater to Wen Hsien, and there it was vaguely held out to us that we might possibly hear news of it. Here, then, we bade final farewell to our late mulemen and the chair; it became a case of engaging a fresh train to go forward, while we ourselves must now be content to ride the ponies wherever the wild road permitted. These readjustments in China mean delay; more especially do they mean delay in a city of ill-disposition. The men first of all have to be got hold of; they are scattered about over the country, on their farms, and so forth, and as often as not refuse even to come into town until the strong arm of the Yamun has been invoked. But if they do turn up, there now proceeds an interminable *va-et-vient* of bargaining, which, again, as often as not, proves quite abortive until the Yamun intervenes, states a proper price, and orders them to accept it on peril of being well beaten. In different districts the mule-owners vary in obstinacy, but common to all is a singular obtuseness to their own interests in refusing the ample terms offered by the traveller, with the sole result of having to accept on Yamun orders the much more meagre local tariff, of which, even so, a large proportion sticks to the palms of the Yamun underlings on its way. The one thing certain,

however, is that all these negotiations entail delay, and delay upon delay, and yet further delay, until the sharp-set soul of the Westerner faints away within him.

But frettings and fussings are futile; the sooner you learn to appreciate Chinese "Mah man dzô" as the exact equivalent of the Japanese "Tadaima" and the Spanish "Mañana," the more hope you will have of escaping the fate of the fool who tries to hustle the East. In China it is perfectly useless to appoint a date, or even to think of one; sooner or later you will get where you want to go and do what you want to do. What does it matter whether it be late or soon? If you kick against the pricks of Chinese procrastination you only provoke amusement, without the least benefit to yourself and your plans. It takes experience to learn the secret of China's huge and imperturbable leisureliness. This mysterious country, her officials and machinery, seem to be for ever bombinating in a vacuum of futile talk; yet somehow, beneath a cloud of words and cross-purposes, the required advance does get made, by every means of progression except a straightforward one; and where no movement has been apparent, the Western onlooker is suddenly amazed to see that the move has been made, and often with a vertiginous rapidity that takes one's breath away.

It is no good to press forward, to hector, to instruct in quicker methods, to heat your blood in a fever of impatience; China has her own ways, has had them very successfully for four thousand years, during two thousand of which most of Europe was in darkness (and in the end seems dissolving into darkness and chaos once more). China, accordingly, is not in the least impressed with the results of European methods, and quite counts

upon going on in her own ways for another four thousand years at least. She laughs gently at our hurry; well may we of Europe and America, parvenus and ephemeral, scramble for our hay in the brief hour of our sunshine. It is quite otherwise with the immemorial daughter of Han; and ill betide the eager and pushful youngster whom an appointment to some brand-new office brings over to China in hot-headed haste to revolutionise the East with the brisk and business-like orderliness of an American bureau. Trammels of softness immediately involve him on all sides like the clinging nebulosities of an octopus; a genial indifference to times, methods, seasons, and performance, is all that confronts his zeal; and if he unwisely persist in the heart-sickening effort, hardens into a courteous and intangible opposition to everything he proposes, until at last he is delicately driven to develop a sick mother or some such homeward call. China swarms nowadays with official advisers, culled, at high salaries, from the fine flowers of European science. But they are there merely as advertisements of China's up-to-dateness; and their popularity and permanence depend entirely upon the paucity of their advice. It is their names that are wanted, not their interference. The power and influence of these show-pieces is nil; weight in China is exercised only by a few quite obscure Europeans of no apparent place or importance, who are kept busy behind the throne, going in and out to the ruler at their pleasure night and day, while the official advisers sit outside and wait for their audiences, and are valued in proportion as they refrain from advising.

Of all this we had our first miniature experience in Kiai-jô, with its procrastinations and bargainings that clearly showed me once for all how vain it is in China

A Chinese Granny

to hope to do anything by any specified day, and how equally vain to fall into a reaction of despair as to anything ever being attained at all. Just when an object appears most hopeless of achievement, just at that very moment does it come gliding into your grasp with a smooth ease and rapidity that seem like a miracle. Meanwhile, during the discussions, we seized the opportunity to ascend the mountain above the city across the river. The day was one of rare inspiring glory, but here ended its charms. The ascent up that vast down was so pettifogging and arduous that in four hours of sweltering toil under the glare we were only about three-quarters of the way up to the final ridge, where dark little bushes dotted the coarse tangles of the brown and sunburned turf. In the lower slopes the golden Rose threw out burdened arms of opulence, and here and there on stunted stems stood up the wavy moons of the Tree Peony. Otherwise there was nothing to see but a curled-up Jerusalem Rose sort of affair in the blazing rocks, desiccated and tight, that further oppressed one with a sense of the aridness of these hills —for which, indeed, we had been prepared by the barren shingle slopes and naked banks of loess which had made the first part of the ascent.

At last we reached the untilled wild land, which continued up in spur over spur to the crest, clearly yielding everywhere only the same poor and scrubby vegetation. We desisted at last, and decided to go no higher, and swallowed a hasty morsel, while our soldier and the Go-go ascended another hundred feet in search of water from a rough marish fold of the fell above us, and returned with only a lipful of brackish puddle. Around us, though, lay some consolation in the coarse grass-banks and ditches of the fell—a delicate wee

white Iris,* running freely through the tangle, with galaxies of milk-white little diaphanous blooms that suggested those of Triteleia, being of the same skim-milk tone, occasionally flushing in the same way to a skim-milk blue that radiates from the rim of peacock-eye of gold, outlined with a rim of blue that sometimes, though rarely, faintly suffuses all the flower. This delicate-looking treasure copes quite successfully with that hard and brutal herbage, running wirily about like so much couch-grass, and pushing up everywhere around its delicate foliage and thread-fine stems, each carrying the starry pure bloom that also recalls some small Poet Narcissus, if it were not that Narcissus brings an image of fat stems and solid texture, whereas this little Iris is as fleshless as a cricket's creak, and of a texture no more solid than a dream. It is, too, as a dream that here I dwell upon its charms; for I could not manage to get plants of it later in the season, nor was ever able to happen on its seeds.

Long we sunned ourselves on that hot high shoulder, gazing out over Kiai-jô lying mapped out below in the flat river-plain, with an endless tossed sea of monotonous-lined mountains all round, sere and dead in an aridness unutterable, yet scraped into faint lines of tillage wherever some amenable flank allowed, unless where the deep rain-ravines too ghastlily tore their flanks, or coal deposits lay dark across their desolateness like shadows of cloud along a range of titanic slag-dumps. Suddenly in the blazing breathlessness of the afternoon a dog-like bark was heard above; and over a high ridge appeared the small grey shape of a little deer, probably disturbed by a leopard up in those scrubby barberry tangles. Motionless he stood fixed, surveying the scene,

* *Iris Henryi.*

made advances and retreats, and finally disappeared. This recalled us also from idleness; we rose and began lightly descending the track, wondering how it came so glassily smooth. Then, high up behind us, we saw advancing down upon us what seemed like a string of colossal beetles. The mystery was solved. For these proved to be women and small children, sent daily up into the mountain to collect dry scrub for fuel of the Kangs, and now returning concealed from view beneath so vast a burden of brushwood as made their resemblance to beetles yet more noticeable as they passed ahead of us down the track, concealed, as it were, beneath a trailing carapace of coppice, sticking far out beyond their heads like antennæ, and behind so closely sweeping the path that there was no wonder, after so many ages of their passing, that it had become as hard and bare as a well-broomed floor. So we followed them on in a mellowing afternoon that enriched the dry distances with colour, and made the corn-laps blaze emerald in the slanting beams above the transfigured shingle stretches of the gleaming river, split in many channels. In the ark-like ferry-boat we once more crossed its muddy tide that has so justly brought it the name of the Blackwater, and none the less found refreshment in dangling our tired feet into its delicious swirling coldness. Kiai-jô and all our chattels still fortunately remained where they did, and negotiations were still trailing forward amicably, though with no more hope than before of any early result.

Another idle day, however, and the bargain was reluctantly struck, though only on the forceful intervention of the Yamun, as we had feared would have to be the case. On the morrow we rose early, accordingly, in hopes of prompt packings, prompt departure, and a

good day's journey to some distant stage. Little did I then know my China. Of all its delays, the final are the most delaying. And when it is a case of a train of commandeered mules, the agitations are without end. First of all, there is no unanimity or punctuality about the arrival of the mules. There has been a general agreement to start, let us say, at seven on the morrow without fail. Duly you rise, and all your bales and bags and baggages and bedding are corded and made ready betimes for the promised mules. And then you sit with folded hands in patience till about nine, when three of them do turn up. Another hour brings a fourth, and then a fifth; at eleven there is a great burst of half a dozen or so; but it is not till mid-day, at least, and then only after expeditions to the Yamun and consequent threatenings, that the full tale is finally made up, and you hear far off up the street the jingling bells that tell you your last defaulters are actually on their way. And now you are going to be off, you think. In the words of the vulgar, I don't think. Pandemonium, on the contrary, immediately breaks loose, and seems likely to outlast eternity. Each man rushes for what he imagines are the lightest burdens (unless, of course, as often happens, the weighing-up and packing of the packs has been done overnight, in which case nothing remains but to scream and rage and rush round generally in a fury, and fall over everybody else, and get as mixed up as possible. Retyings go on, repackings and balancings. Some of them are quarrelling in a corner over a pile of cash; in the other the landlord, in the midst of a thrilled crowd, is squatting over his payment: a question of a half-penny lets loose what seems the passions of hell. Then, just when despair has wholly submerged you, the

babel ceases abruptly; a tall mule, shaking its caparison of bells and tassels, is led out into the midst, bows its head, and, as if it were playing at oranges and lemons, advances under the arch of the pack-cradle, held aloft by a muleteer on either side. Neatly this sinks upon its saddle, is poked and adjusted to precision, and the job is done. With stately step the leader stalks away out of the yard, and one by one the rest of the train receive their loads and follow suit. In less time than one could have imagined possible the endless turmoil ends; one mounts one's pony at the tail of the procession, and slowly the whole caravan files smoothly out into the street, sped on its way with universal courtesies and smiles.

Eastwards along the plain of the Blackwater we rode, towards its sharp turn towards the south. Actually we were going in precisely the wrong direction, for the blessed haven of our summer's work and the stately ranges of Tibet lay directly westward, only some three days' journey up the river to Siku. But no one knew anything about the Alps, and it seemed plain that our best plan was to go round the low projecting heel of Kansu (see the map), where we should have the exploring of a very remote and interesting piece of country anyhow, and be bound sooner or later, somewhere, from somebody, to hear something about the direction of the Alps. Incidentally, too, we learned the strength of Kiai-jô's position, and why it is that the sunny, smiling little place is so safe and sure a citadel for all the iniquities of China. For now we were on the main south road, its only means of approach from Szechwan. We shall soon see what this is; while its only northern approach from Lanchow we have already seen, along that perilous gorge which is as nothing to the tremendous

ravines of the Blackwater which we are now approaching. In front of Kiai-jô rise the impassable arid ranges we attempted, while to the west the main road runs along the Blackwater still, towards the Ultima Thule of Siku (beyond which immediately rise the vast walls of Tibet, where no reasonable person ever goes), and then diverges up the deep and dangerous valley of the Nan Hor towards the far western towns of Kansu up the northern fringes of Tibet, and ultimately to Lanchow.

The first day's stage was not long. It never is, for the mulemen like to harden their beasts gradually to the trail with a first easy day; which counts among the many reasons why one is never allowed to set off as early as one had intended. On our left continued the gaunt and torrid mountains, but on the right the ranges showed more vegetation on their northward slope; and behind our ridge of the other day now appeared the towering snow-streaked wall of cliff and forest that we had sighted from afar before coming into Kiai-jô. It was not later than three o'clock in that golden afternoon that we reached our day's terminus at the clean little sweet village of Thirty-Li, lying embowered in a boscage of willows. On the flat mud roof of the tiny inn we lay and lounged. Gradually the distances assumed Provençal tones of blue and misty mauve; out came the evening star in the greening sky, and buzzards began to wheel with delicate whistlings. We descended, and, pending dinner, strolled along the road under the willow-shade, beyond which stretched away level plains of corn to the river. One quite expected clouds of fireflies here, in a scene so reminiscent of the evening stroll at Storo; but only the musical crickets trilled deliciously in the ditches along beside the road, and trilled and trilled more sweetly as the dark sank

down, till at last we went in to establish ourselves in our two minute cabins of mud, black as midnight but for a small opening in the roof.

The next day's journey was very memorable, arduous, and long. About four miles east of Thirty-Li the Blackwater swings at a right angle away to the south, and enters its system of magnificent gorges. All day we accompanied its turbid soup-coloured tide. The sky was cloudless, and the heat almost unbearable in the interminable ravines. The journey repeated our final stage into Kiai-jô, but on an infinitely grander scale. Buttress after buttress of precipice stands barring the way along the river, foaming deep amid the rocks; between each buttress stretches a wide sweep of soft and cultivated ground, a bay of a mile or so in length, luxuriant with trees, and each nourishing in their greenest heart a little happy mud village set in tangles of glowing scarlet pomegranate, and the heavy emerald of Persimmon, and the gawky elegance of Melia, now flooding the world with the most entrancing fragrance from its countless clustered clouds of soft lilac stars.

The cliffs and gloomy narrows of the gorges are sinister and forbidding as their sunny intervals are luxuriant and smiling; the rock is dark and cruel and barren, nourishing only the most arid shrubs and plants, dry wiry growths of grey metallic tone, thin things, refined and skinny, waving in wiry tangles from the precipice, or standing stark in thorny stiff hands-offishness. As the sun mounted we dripped in streams; most often it was too dangerous to ride along some rotten gallery built out from the face of the cliff above the torrent, or down the descent of slippery steep stones, in which the track rounds some high precipitous bastion, of which your sure-footed mount has been able to

manage the ascent. Then we got off and walked, and when we remounted the iron of the stirrups scorched one's soles, and the saddle was a red-hot stimulus. Up and down we toiled and clambered all day, round bend after bend of the river, over headland after headland. At the most perilous corners presided Our Lady of Mercy from her tiny shrine pecked in the precipice, and far, far above us, immediately impending, shot up jagged huge mountains, perfectly bare and dry and dead, a tumble of rocks and ruin, but now and then mocking our thirst ridiculously with what looked like smooth cliff-faces of gleaming dampness, which in reality were only the delusive sheen of mica-slabs up there in the topmost gullies, so deceiving that if they had not shone so very high above one longed again and again to go and refresh one's shrivelling tongue against their cool walls.

The whole place seemed lifeless and incapable of life; the only flower that showed was a thing of the dead. For up and down the vast sombre cliffs and ledges stood the pallid flames of the Asphodel, like ghosts of corpse-candles in a valley of dry bones. Sometimes the mountains, though, gave more sign of life. At one point, in a bay of comfort, I lay out on my back beneath the voluminous verdure of a Persimmon, and looked straight up overhead at an impending pine-dotted peak across the river, whose rocky flanks and bald pinnacles and dotted aromatic vegetation carried my mind back to the foothills of the Maritime Alps at the mouth of the Roja Valley. At other times the outlines recalled the Southern Dolomites, and, to make the reminiscence keener, salt lay here and there encrusted along their strata, with the effect of old and fading snow. Gradually I might even then have begun to realise how

faithfully Chinese art, in all its apparent fantasy, does really represent the essence of Chinese landscape; but one's efforts were too wholly concentrated on enduring the vicissitudes of the grilling day and anticipating its end.

This came unexpectedly at a very inferior little mud village (called " Opening of Peach Bloom ") in a fertile bay. Here we had difficulty, so poor was the place, in obtaining accommodation, the inns being already crowded. At last, however, one landlord, mollified by our respect for his dead baby, at that moment lying in state in the best bedroom, offered us the second best. We preferred the roof, though, and there had our beds deployed, while we ourselves went out to flounder awhile deliciously in a backwater of the river, secure from the eyes of Mrs. Grundy, who, in China, though more candid than her European sister in many ways, is a great deal stricter in her disapproval of nudity, to the point that, no matter how often a Chinese may have to wade a river (a thing he acutely hates), he will always put his trousers on immediately he has reached the other side, even if they are to come off again within a hundred yards. Divinely refreshed from the dust and heats of the day, we returned at last to our roof, and now found ourselves much better able to appreciate the charm of this little green oasis in this gaunt and barren land. We lay and luxuriated, drowned in the sweet wafts of Orange and Melia, confronting a gloaming of soft amethyst ranges interfolded against pale gold, until at length the dark came down as sudden as a lid descending, and all the stars flashed out.

The road next day was much the same at first. Gradually we turned westwards, over buttresses more rocky and along precipices even more daunting than yester-

day's; yet still continued meeting the incessant trains of mules that had kept us so often delaying. And long processions, too, of men bearing on their backs huge hampers of medicine as large as themselves, or enormous wickered vats of oil. To order in a line they go, advance for ten yards or so, then, on the signal of their leader, all come to a halt and rest, easying off their burden with their walking staff, now used to prop it up behind, serving them as a third leg or a kangaroo's tail. A minute's pause, and they are off again, slowly and methodically, to rest again ten yards farther, and then again go forward. So the poor snails proceed in what looks like a nightmare of slowness, and, indeed, would be so felt anywhere but in this very ancient and leisurely land. The way is hard and hot and stony, the steep descents of cobble or rock-cut steps as arduous as the corresponding climb up the other side of the headland. One wonders at the unhuman endurance and courage of these people, and at the fact that they do untiringly attain their destination.

Even for us the day's progress was more difficult, and riding almost always impossible, except in the very brief interspaces of level that occurred in stretches of soft black sand silted up in wide bays by the river under the cliffs. The water was low; thus we were sometimes able to track up its very sand-flats, and snap our fingers at the permanent track vertiginously clinging along the stark face of the precipice above us. In flood-time, indeed, that austere upper path is the only possible, and so continues for half the year; but in spring, and until the snows of the Tibetan Highland are filling all the channels of the land to overflowing with a roaring race of mud-coloured waters, it is possible on the trail to economise distance and labour by keeping

to the bed of the stream itself, and cutting off the bays by continuing straight forward on their soft black depths of silt. And here and there, to emphasise the comforts of proceeding safely down below on the flat, the rotting skeleton of a mule tells of the perils of that upper path along the cliff's face, into whose cavities the coffins are so cunningly tucked and perched, even into the most impossible places, where you can hardly imagine how their manipulators got them there, in some grotto half-way down the sheer precipice. It is always wiser, indeed, to proceed on foot along those galleries, where even a mule's sure balance can be upset by some unexpected impact of his pack upon a corner of the rock. Horses are much clumsier cattle in such places, and their lumbering great feet, one feels, are sure to slip on the smooth ascent of some slab a couple of feet wide or so, with the whirlpools or the angry black reefs awaiting your fall, like so many hungry sharks, a hundred feet below.

So the Blackwater raged onward down gorges deeper and tighter than yesterday's. Osteomeles stood out on the crags, stiff and thorny and like an ungracious hawthorn bush crabbed with thirst; and in the hard irony rock shone silvery the flat grey rosettes of Bœa, so suggestive of far-away Jankæa. At last, however, the valley widened, and a latéral one came down from the west out of a cooler-looking country to meet it at a right angle. We rounded a village on a shoulder and turned a corner. Far down below us lay a bridge spanning the terrible Blackwater, which here makes its turn leftwards and south-eastwards again into a new gorge. It was over that bridge we were to go, and away up the lateral westerly valley, to cut across the little range that separates the Blackwater and the White-

water before they meet at Biku, and there become the Min Hor, which in time becomes the Ja-ling Jang, which in time becomes the Yangdze Jang. Here, then, we bade farewell to the Blackwater and the main road down into Szechwan through the ravines; we could not tell in what circumstances, and how soon, we were to see that muddy tide again in the uproarious youth of its upper reaches where it comes raging out of Tibet. Nor could we tell the full extent of our luck in being now to slip away westward of the river into the wild and lonely land; we did not know that within a few days now the ravenous Wolves were to come pouring tumultuous up this very road, and leave all the pleasant little villages we had traversed a desolation of blood and blackened ruins. By this time, though we heard nothing of it, the Plain of Shensi was a surf of rebellion, in which only Sian still stood like an island of comparative security. All the rascality of Soaring Phœnix and the wicked little hamlets along the foothills of the Tsin-Ling had duly erupted and helped to swell the armies of the Wolf, which, round a nucleus of only two or three thousand trained men, developed into torrents of twenty thousand reckless ruffians or more, attracting more and more of their likes in each district they traversed, and accumulating new forces in each, while the old ones dropped off when their own province had been thoroughly ravaged.

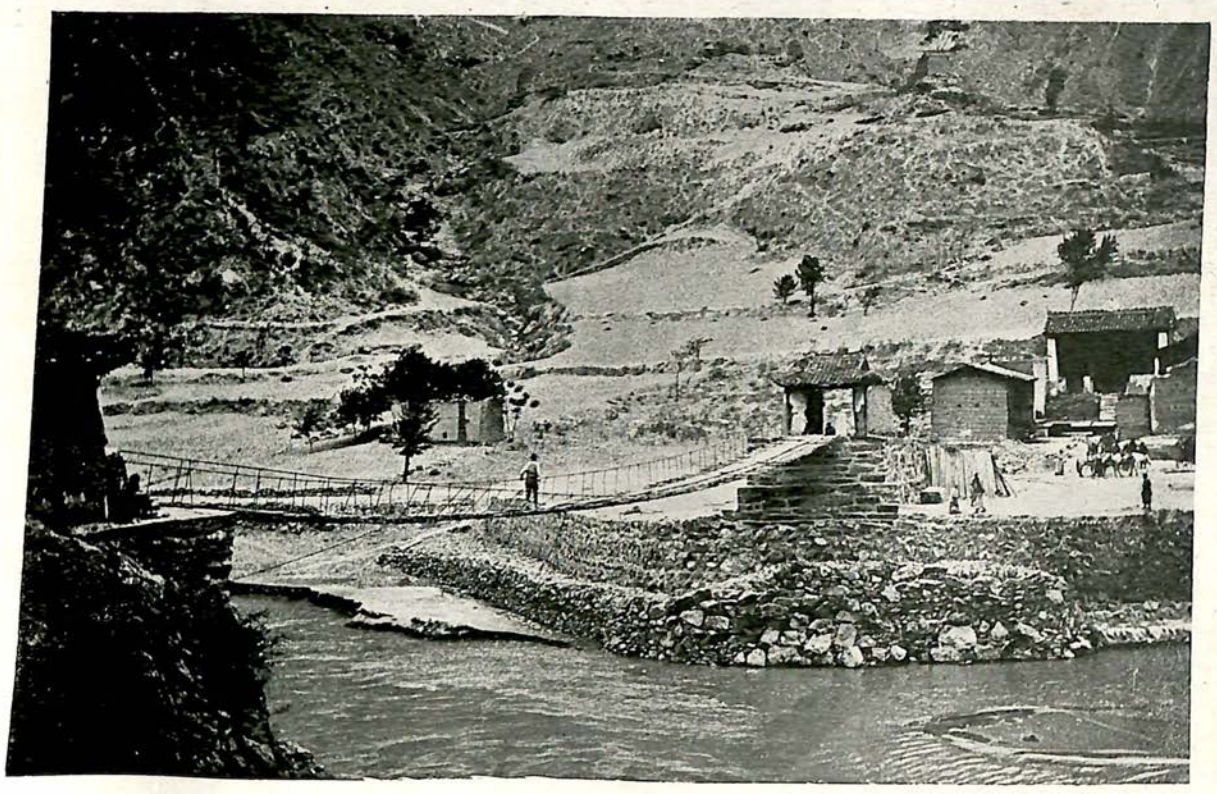
But, with Shensi thus at their feet, the Wolves were going to have a try for Kansu, too. The first army had swept up into Shensi round the easterly edge of the Tsin-Ling; a second was now hastening up by the border ranges of Hupeh, and round the westerly edge of the Tsin-Ling, thus to hold Shensi safely gripped between the two bodies, and so be able to join the two floods

of their forces against Kansu. The merest pretence at protection could absolutely have barred their northward advance anywhere in these unnegotiable gorges which are the one key to Kansu from the south, or, higher up, in the ravines of the Nan Hor; in point of fact, no step whatever was taken, and it was only on the heights of Lotus Mountain and Monk Mountain that at last the Mahomedan troops, after a good deal of dubitation and diplomacy, did at last bar the advance of the Wolves upon the northern capital, and that only after many thousands of lives and many prosperous cities had been sacrificed all up the borders of Tibet.

Our own share in these important matters lay in the extreme felicity of our flights; again and again we just eluded the Wolf's army by the merest good chance, arriving just after it, or slipping aside from the road just before it came along, skimming zigzag, beyond his ken, to and fro between China and Tibet. The better luck for us, for though some of his forces had respect for foreigners, the major part were an uncontrollable wild horde of roughs, gathering and dissipating round him from district to district, who would certainly have had very much less regard for our persons than for the large loads of silver with which our mules were laden for the two years' supply. In point of fact, the wires of China were already thrilling with anxiety about our whereabouts, and the authorities grievously regretted having allowed us to pass westward out of Sian in times so stormy, though even yet they did not know the worst. Anxious telegrams and messages were keeping all the harassed local Governors on the jump about the two foreigners now lost to sight in the mountain labyrinth of the March, and the Viceroy from Lanchow was perpetually enjoining them in passionate edicts to catch

and cage these wanderers on the first occasion, and keep them safe out of harm's way—at a moment, too, when the luckless men were turning grey with the urgency of keeping their very cities safe and their own throats intact.

But this is all proleptic: nothing could have seemed more safely destined for everlasting and inviolable peace than the hot, smiling valley of the Blackwater that day when we descended the long slope to the river, and set ourselves to face the perils of the bridge. It was an ambitious affair, indeed, of iron railing and a few planks laid across from span to span; but jerry-built and gaping and defective. It hopped and swung and swayed; at every step or so you looked down upon a pleasing vista of the Blackwater surging insatiably about thirty feet below. This edifice, accordingly, inspired the mules with a very reasonable lack of confidence; the sagacious animals jibbed heartily, and could by no means be induced to proceed. At last we had to make a solid path for each in turn, solidifying the length of the bridge in front of them by planks transferred from the length they had already traversed. The process, ten times repeated, was lengthy; each mule was stripped of its pack and elaborately coaxed across. The bridge rocked and shook and clanked in a most terrifying manner as they advanced; though I, indeed, had a superstitious feeling that no untoward thing would really happen. For who ever heard of an exploring expedition suffering such disaster on its outward way? These distressing accidents happen only, and happen always, when the explorers are returning home in triumph with all their spoils; the high gods disdaining to plunder the empty-handed, but preferring to wait until they can sweep all their laborious collections of



CROSSING THE BRIDGE OVER THE BLACKWATER

specimens and photographs out of earthly knowledge at one fell swoop, and handsomely account for the collectors arriving home with none.

Even we ourselves, and even the captious and half-blind pony, at last picked our way delicately across that Brig o' Dread without ill event, and found ourselves safely on the other side in a little village. We now turned back awhile, up the other bank of the Blackwater, opposite to the one we had descended; then turned a corner, and found ourselves in the lateral valley we had seen across the river. The aspect of the country began to change as if by miracle, and as the track along the hillside was too bad for our going, we continued ascending in the wide shingle-stretches of the stream, in which flowed many little rills all of the purest diamond clearness, and a most refreshing sight after the turbid mud-tides of the dry lands. We crossed and recrossed, drank the cold purity, and continued joyfully up the gradual ascent towards mountains that from afar seemed much more richly clothed with woodland and vegetation than we had ever seen before.

Quite early, and very unexpectedly, we pulled into the tiny village of Temple of the Spirit of the People,* nestling amid verdure under the side of the hill in the depths of the now narrowing ravine, where a very friendly Mahomedan landlord received us heartily, and attended to our needs. When we had settled in for the day I went out into the stream-bed, and paddled through its various rills and over the strips of shingle to the farther side after a fleshy-flowered creeper like *Hoya carnosa* which was trailing over the rocks; and gradually wandered up the gorge in the sinking light of evening, to where a limpid springlet bubbled under

* Lao Yeh Miao.

the rocks in a lawn of turf and mint-scented fine herbage, amid which glowed luscious-looking wild ripe strawberries of the most delusive beauty. For these are only the insipid arid fruits of *Fragaria indica*, so common over Northern China, and always attracting the attention of travellers with the rich scarlet promise of its fruits thick by the wayside ditches. Here Purdom joined me, and we lay long and meditated. The air was cool and delicious after the veiled sultriness of the day (as if a storm had somewhere broken) under flying grey cloud-masses at sunset. No rain had fallen in Lao Yeh Miao for a year past; the nearer slopes were baked and dry. But away up at the gorge's head loomed a noble mountain-mass so well clothed in woodland and verdure that it evidently must be in the cooler zone of rains. And it felt as if even down in the thirsty hollows the long-awaited wet must surely be at hand.

And in the night, indeed, it did duly rain, and still was pouring when we rose to make our move. But soon it ceased and the clouds ravelled away, and the day emerged balmy, breezy, brilliant, and glorious. The way lies ever higher and higher in the narrowing gorge up behind that delightful little sequestered nook. The stream disappears into the earth for a mile or two above the village, and its bed is a mere waste of boulders, above which winds the track along hillsides snowed under by rounded bushes of the small Sophora, here more profuse and beautiful than I have ever seen this typical dry-ground shrub, and often taking beautiful tones of faintly hinted blue in all its myriads of tiny drooping clusters along the arching sprays. Another typical plant of the barrens was still here also, Osteomeles, stark and graceless, but exactly like a stumpy hawthorn now in the full burden of its blossom; and

occasionally flashed out the gold of Cæsalpinia in the hedges, like a magnified laburnum turned the wrong way up. But all these are thirsty souls, confined to the hot, dry districts; until they cease, there is no hope of cooler mountainous conditions. Gradually we coiled upwards into the intermediate zone, where they began to grow scarcer and poorer, and at last ceased altogether, as gradually we plunged higher and deeper into the hills, under plumy fantastic pinnacles of rock and verdure, and between steep mountain-sides dense in many shades of budding green and red, all a hazy splendour of spring promise, with the lower slopes a tangle of *Rosa Banksiæ* in mounds and hummocks of hotly fragrant snow.

The glen was very lovely; the beck appeared again, clear and living and joyful as it bubbled along in the dappled shade. Among the coppice was Dipelta, in rich glory, and *Lonicera pileata* like a little box; two stately old Judas-trees, a pair of them, were superb in light and shade of their fine flickering young foliage. But here, just as I was rapt in contemplation of a Fringe-tree, one snow-shower of tasselled blossom, the mountains gave me a marked hint of their malignant presences, so justly dreaded by the peasantry. For, as we coiled along the side of a coppiced ravine, suddenly the peak above began dropping stones upon our heads; crashing through the wounded woodland the boulders came hurtling in a surf of broken boughs and tattered leafage, plunged and bounded and ricochetted down the three hundred feet of their descent, and warned us by no means to linger in that particular ravine.

A little higher, and I, who had loitered over some treasure, saw Purdom at pause ahead of me, gazing anxiously down into the gorge. Before I could reach

him he had gone down into its sombre depths, and it was not till I stood panting on the spot that I could see the reason of his interest. Here the stream makes a sudden bend so deep between dark narrows of shelving precipices that neither light nor air could penetrate that steamy abysm, which must have been like a shuttered hothouse all the year, as well one could judge from the soft lush look of the vegetation that waved so luxuriantly in all the folds of the hills, and yet more densely overarched the gorge. This was closely walled in on the farther side by black shaly ledges that rose over and over each other in a tilt so steep as to look like a sloping titanic wall of slabs, littered with layers of rotten leaves from the trees that crowded the brim of the ravine, and shrouded it in perpetual shelter. And all up that wall, in erupting tuffets and mats, there shone a starry flame like sets of living amethyst in the gloom. For an instant my heart turned over, and I jumped at the belief that here was our first Primula in this obviously suitable spot; but no, I soon saw it a little orchid, a Pleione,* sprouting so prematurely from those lodged beds of dead leaves long before its own begin to think of unfolding. It had all the tropical look of its southerly cousins, the strange radiance, the crystalline exotic loveliness; its ample lip was ribbed with ridges of the richest blood-scarlet fur that set just the right finish on the rosy magenta of the segments. And though it is a very far northward cry for *Pleione Roylei* thus to be found in the remote exile of Northern China, the aspect of it and of the place it grows in forbid one to forget that here we are, after all, in the farthest southerly extension of Kansu, somewhere on a geographical level with North

* *P. Roylei*, var.

Africa, and finding the plant, too, in circumstances peculiarly sheltered and tropical. So that "North China" gives but a misleading notion of the Pleione's taste in climate. And, indeed, the discussion is as yet academic, for I have so far failed utterly to make her tolerate foreign travel, and never, except in this one spot, again for sure set eyes on her.

After this first excitement the way grew steadily more and more beautiful as it wound upward in the wooded tranquillity of the ravine; at one point there was a gabled bridge that spanned a torrent deep between the mossy cliffs, and on the other side of the sombre cañon a little wooded pinnacle rose sharp and straight into the sunlight. As I advanced in the darkness below there shone down a flash of radiant purple from the hilltop; I wrestled my way up its slippery steep side through tangles of Dipelta and golden Jew's Mallow, now no more regarded, until on the top I came on a straggly bush of Rhododendron verging to what popular taste still thinks of as Azalea, all one mass of crimson-violet flowers. Though often and often afterwards I saw this plant, a commonplace of all the lower alpine woodland in these ranges, I never again saw it in such splendour as here on the pinnacle, from which I now descended again to the moss-grown millhouse and cottages that lurk in the green depths below, tucked against the side of the gorge. From these you next emerge into a higher and more open stretch of valley, where at last I lay and rested and lunched off my usual fare of cold tea and toast and honey in a pleasant glade full of *Adiantum pedatum* and a delicate lilac meadow rue.

Soon after this the valley died out into the mountain barrier in front, and we deserted the trough of it to mount very steeply in long zigzags up and up the face

of the right-hand down, first of all through the coppice, and so to the level of the comparatively rarely dotted pines,* heavy with plumage of rich bright green; and then up higher yet to a level above all shrubs, with a view away back down the whole length of the wooded vale to the ranges behind on the far side of the distant Blackwater. So we came out upon the pass, with rolling fells of woodland, rounded and leisurely, flowing away above us to the left, where Takin might perhaps be found. But there was no sudden and dramatic forward prospect, as I had hoped, over the abrupt magnificence of the Tibetan snows. There was only a strong, bitter wind under a grey sky, and depth over depth of descent below, with similar wooded undulations beyond. I dismounted and walked down through dense brakes of the Little Bamboo, still sere and wintry. Near the col there were plantations of medicinal rhubarb, and on the rocks in the coppice below an orchid was sending up large leaves, and there were tuffets of a large leathery hart's tongue of opaque and dusty effect. And then round a corner I came suddenly on a stretch of cleared coppice as it might have been in Kent. And here in the renewed sunlight shone drifts of a snowy Wood Anemone to complete the resemblance, with its little white upstanding stars, amid a jungle of bronzy young fronds of the maidenhair just unfurling. Here and there arose in a rosier tone of bronze the ample lovely leafage of *Rodgersia pinnata*, solitary on tall stems, and most sumptuous of all were the mounded piles of glossy emerald iridescence that were the Giant Lily beginning to amass the splendours of the foliage which slugs, as a rule, so completely rob us of at home that its famous rainbow glint had always

* *P. Armandii.*

seemed to me rather an enthusiast's fable until I saw it there that day among the brushwood in pyramids of prismatic sheen shimmering in the slants of the sunlight.

The track continued downwards to a little village beneath a sharp hummock where a temple squatted in the shelter of converging glens, clouded about in the fleecy filmy green of Celtis,* surely the most lovely of all big trees, with its stately beech-like boles of smooth dove-grey diapered with patches of russet-red where the patches of bark have peeled, and its ample stately volume, but always cloudlike and delicate in effect, of tiny elm-like leaves of indescribably soft pale green in spring, but always of an elfin elegance beyond parallel, and of colouring successively glorious from the first burst of April till the whole cirrhus-cloud of the tree passes away in a pale blaze of gold. This, in these parts, is essentially a temple treasure, a thing of culture. I do not believe it is here truly wild; but never a shrine will you see, or an ancient graveyard tangled up in coppice under the sunny slope of the hill beyond a village, without its specimens of this glory in floating vapours of fine foliage familiar to all those who have wondered in Oriental art what particular tree it is that produces the familiar gauzy effect of emerald loveliness in the landscape. The possibilities of "Celtis" in culture I dare not forecast; it is evidently a plant of the warmer southern regions. I can hardly say I have seen it north of the Nan Hor, and I am quite certain I have seen it nowhere north of Lanchow. These facts point to care for it, and a warm place in our plantations as in our affections; the latter it will very certainly gain if once it can be led to appreciate the former. But

* No, not Celtis, I believe.

many years must yet pass, anyhow, before the mature tree can show us its full loveliness of smooth grey column and gracious giant branchings that combine to put the beech to shame.

Down and down to the left we wound beneath banks of hanging woodland, now in a haze of young verdure. Ere long we debouched into a vast gorge of naked cliffs, from which in heavy sprays of snow the Deutzia floundered, while on the most inaccessible walls (only) flared the hot light purple of a very splendid lilac. On the ledges here occurred a most beautiful small Iris in grassy tufts, with large flowers of mottled pale clear blue with brindlings, and an intense fragrance of violets. So dainty a fairy was this that between the blotting-paper she became a mere mushy ghost, transparent and colourless; never a specimen could be turned out satisfactorily, and finally my fallible human memory confused her identity later on with that of the Butterfly Iris of the Alps, from which the fact of her fragrance is enough to separate her. At the bottom of the gorge we emerged upon a vast desert of boulders and ruin; in and out among these blocks there flaunted a Buddleia with huge foliage of grey flannel that develops later than its ample branching bunches, sumptuous as a lilac's, of soft golden-eyed lavender stars, and sweeter than any other Buddleia I know, with a delicious keen scent of raspberry ice. But the grey flannel Buddleia* we soon learned to greet as the harbinger of hot, dry lands and the lower tropical barrens; all up this region it is the pride of the blazing rocks and cliffs about the sun-baked villages in the troughs of the rivers.

And, indeed, we were now descending rapidly towards the hot and arid levels to which we had said farewell

* *B. Farreri*, sp. *nova*.

in parting from the Blackwater, far too low for any plants of alpine kindred or interest. So thought I as I left behind me a little hamlet in the widening ravine, above which, on the left, sprayed and floated down a Staubbach of white spray from the lip of a precipice high above. No use in toiling up there, I felt, for the Primula that, at cooler elevations, might reasonably have been to be expected in such a place; onwards I trudged through the narrowing cliffs, and down a long series of cobbled zigzags that vaguely reminded me of the Miniera di Tenda on the long descent into San Dalmazzo. The lowest reaches of the valley were stony and torrid and dull; though the Golden Rose here reappeared more sumptuous than ever, I was sickened to see once more the arid Asphodel that seems the very incarnation of drought and death and dulness. And then, at about four, we turned a corner and quite unexpectedly tumbled up against the battlemented city wall of Wen Hsien.

Into the town we proceeded, soon coming upon Purdom, who had ridden ahead to see what quarters were prepared by the Yamun runners from Kiai-jô whom we had sent on to make ready. He could find out no word of their preparations or whereabouts when he arrived, and, finding nothing to meet us, had commandeered an empty house close at hand. Here, then, we disembarked and exchanged news, the most important of which was that he, ascending bravely to the foot of that Staubbach I had despised, *did* find there, in damp mossy wads all up the precipice, wet with the blown spray of the fall, that very Primula of which I had felt the elevation offered no hope. Much excitement reigned, for this was our first flowering specimen of the race which seems to have attained sovereign

position over all other alpine races. It was so far a flowering specimen, indeed, that it was actually gone quite out of bloom by April 28, and only a few withered tags enabled us to judge the charm of its short-stemmed, well-furnished heads of large blossom so attractive above the golden meal of its densely matted rosettes in masses that suggest church hassocks on the cliff.

But now came along the defaulting Yamun men, and distracted our ecstasies by telling us that the lord of the town had indeed provided quarters for us, though nobody had had the sense to come out and meet us and tell us so. Now that we had unpacked we were most urgently entreated to move along again into the town and take the apartments arranged for us within the city walls, safe under the immediate authority and neighbourhood of the Yamun. So with some annoyance we proceeded to remove from our clean and vacant yard, feeling how particularly necessary it was to conciliate the official on whom depended all our plans for getting on to the difficult and dangerous Chagola, the very mention of which had already aroused much trepidation among our mulemen and hangers-on, who would sit on the Kang at night exchanging more and more horrific tales of burnings alive and other pleasant practices that prevail among Tibetans of the March, till by now their allegiance was distinctly doubtful.

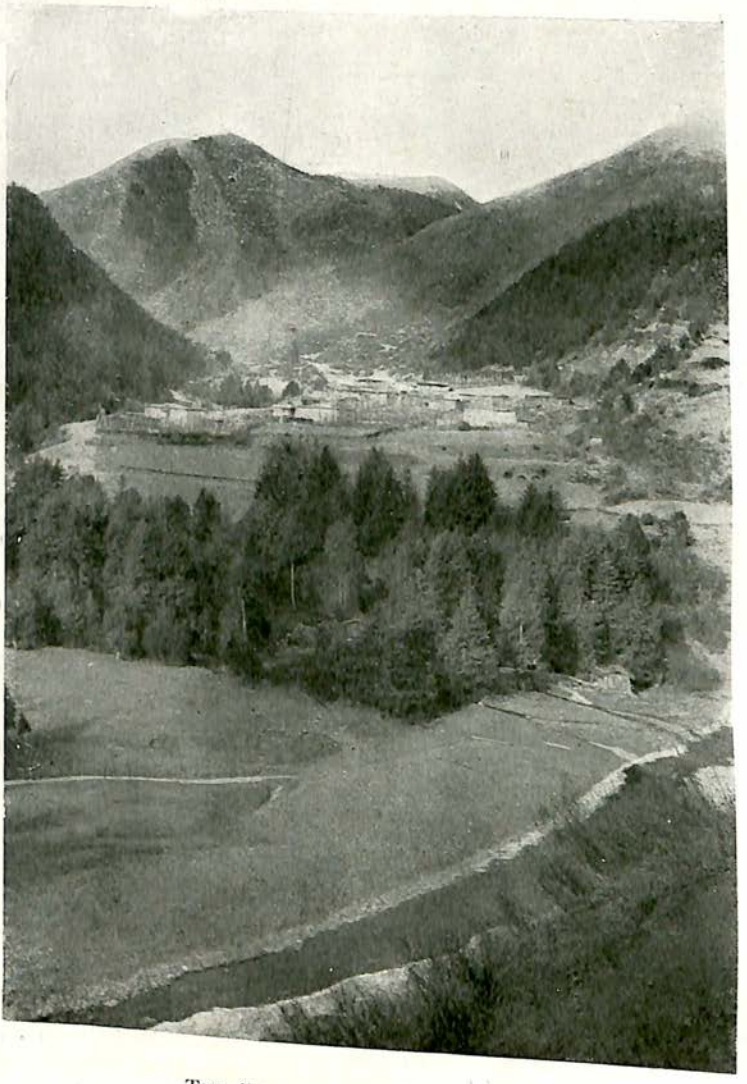
We resaddled, then, in order to make our entry in due state, and with all the pomp we could muster advanced riding in a state procession into Wen Hsien, down the cobbled shady streets athrong with pleasant people, on whom the excessive majesty of my demeanour was not needed, till we reached a very comfortable small inn, close under the farther gateway of the wall, where we found that the most lordly rooms indeed

had been made ready for us, the landlord and his people, no less than the Mandarin, showing themselves all quite singularly anxious to oblige and be friendly. Here the dense and curious mob that had flowed after us in a gathering tide down the streets at last deserted us, and we were left to enjoy our quiet meal to the chaunting of a choir of children going by in a procession to offer up prayers for rain, while close at hand was another devotee making his orisons with rhythmical taps like the beating of an omelette.

CHAPTER VII

INTO TIBET

At Wen Hsien the anticipated difficulties began immediately to gather round our path. For here we were well within reach of the reputation of Chagola, now not more than four days' distant to the west; and that reputation proved to be of the very worst. The Mandarin was in a high state of alarm when he heard that we wanted to proceed there, and every step consistent with courtesy was taken to dissuade us. There was no hint given of the real character of the place, indeed, for such candours are not in the spirit of Chinese diplomacy, nor would any Mandarin choose to reveal his powerlessness over a district nominally subject to the Empire. But with mild obliqueness he made much of the badness of the roads and the scantiness of food in that region, and made it very plain to us that we should need much patience if we were to gain our point. We did not, indeed, as yet set eyes on the great man in person. He proposed to call in state, sedan-chair, flounced umbrella of scarlet silk, and all, and kept us hanging about through the morning trying to prepare suitable pomp for his reception. Finally, we sat down to snatch a morsel, and were in the middle when, lo! in the words of the classic, "I hear far off the trumpets of the King," and there was the procession advancing down the street. And then it paused; the great man heard we were at lunch, was



THE "LATERAL VALLEY OPPOSITE"

reluctant to disturb us, and so turned round and went home again, and never came at all.

Our negotiations in the meantime were conducted by the Mafu, who, of low origin and no education though he was, had acquired in the course of travel a useful knowledge of Yamun etiquette, and could be trusted to soften his rugged face into the prescribed smiles, and make the prescribed compliments at the proper moments. But even he now took ill with a high temperature, which yet further depressed us for our prospects. And a lurid light was shed on the situation by the behaviour of our mulemen, on whom the terrors of Chagola and the possibility of being ordered thither by the Yamun now so powerfully wrought that in the night they silently made a hole in the wall of their inn, led out their mules by stealth, and when the day broke were over the hills and far away, leaving even the saddles behind in their hurry to be off, to say nothing of forfeiting their wages and forgetting their bill.

We could only exercise diplomacy, and hope to prevail in time with smiles. In a way, tiresome though the departure of the mulemen was, and tiresome as were likely to be the difficulties of getting more, the disappearance of the first lot in such a manner was not wholly to our disadvantage; for it gave us a considerable lever with the Mandarin, who had thus lost "face" heavily, by this insult and inconvenience inflicted on us, and on his own authority under which we were. Accordingly he would be more than ever anxious to oblige us in every possible way, and seize any reasonable loophole of letting us do what we wanted. The diplomatic conversations proceeded, therefore, in perfect amiability, and we expatiated on our desire to spare him trouble, and do only what he sanctioned; and might

we, please, proceed westward along the road to Siku? No word was any longer said of Chagola. We certainly knew, and he probably did, that the road to Siku passes over Chagola itself, and through the very village; but there was no need to draw anyone's attention to this fact, and the mere purpose of going to Siku sounded all that was orderly and respectable, while at the same time leaving us free in every essential to follow our own devices when once we were clear of Wen Hsien.

At the same time, such is the deliberate and horror-stricken ignorance in which the Chinese shroud everything that appertains to the Tibetan March, it is quite likely that Chagola was to all the good people of Wen Hsien a mere name, so dreadful and vague as hardly to be attached to any precise point, but shedding a general gloom of dread over the whole mountain region. In any case, the Mandarin acceded urbanely to our request, and thus removed the first difficulty from our road. For, while it would be possible (though never desirable) to travel in the peaceable plains of China itself without official escorts and sanction, the case is quite different on the border, where, if you openly flout the harassed and anxious Governor, insisting on going where he can neither permit you nor protect you, he may transmit his complaint to the Viceroy of the province, and on the decision of the viceregal court you may find yourself being politely but firmly escorted back to Peking, with your passport revoked, and no further possibility of getting permission to travel in China.

The Lao-ya, however, of Wen Hsien showed himself persistently pleasant all through. Not only did he now change some of our silver at a higher rate than the town's, but set himself diligently to securing a fresh

convoy of mules. So that there was nothing to do but wait patiently till these were collected from the reluctant farmers round about. The days were glorious and without cloud; only the enforced idleness of the situation prevented one from fully appreciating the beauties of Wen Hsien which assuredly, after Siku, must be one of the most delightful spots of Central Asia. In a wide hot bay of the torrid barren hills it lies, a little irregularly shaped walled city, beyond which, down below, lies yet another more irregular walled enclosure of strange shape, filled, as it seemed, with temples and palaces interspersed in the plumy darkness of ancient Cryptomerias. The cobbled streets are neat and picturesque, the wall in fine repair; but the essential beauty of Wen Hsien lies in the voluminous Acacias* which envelop all the main street in delicious green shade. No town I know in China has such umbrageous alleys, or gives such a picture from afar of a city sunk in woodland.

When we had finished with the walls and the streets, there was still the river to go out and see, beyond the South Gate. And the Whitewater is as beautiful as the Blackwater is ugly. Though, like all these easterly streams, it seems here as if it must be born in the Highland of Tibet, the Bei Shui Jang earns its name by being of as clear and crystalline a purity as any stream that breaks from the Ampezzo Dolomites. But it is not white, it is of glassy blue, blue as aquamarine, rippling and foaming in its rocky shallows past that sunny little verdurous town; so clean and sparkling that it seems nothing short of tragedy that its fate is ultimately to be contaminated with the ochre-coloured flood of the Blackwater at Biku, and thence to be for

* *Sophora japonica.*

ever indistinguishably lost in the muddy volume of the Ja-ling Jang and the Yangdze Jang. But nothing of its dark and dirty doom can be divined at Wen Hsien; in floods of crystal it boils along beneath the embankment, and from the crevices of the stone-blocks spring up the ample feathery-leaved shoots of a stately Amphicome (?), whose tall herbaceous stems are now breaking at the top in a shower of what one may best call little foxglove flowers of the most lovely soft clean pink.

So the days passed, and at length, O miracle! on the second of May the mules and everything were as ready for the start as we. Our parting from the old landlord was a parting from a friend. We had photographed him and all his family, we had entertained him to long talks, and prescribed for various ailments; so that he had the highest opinion of our powers, even though we had not been able to save the lady next door, who, having been beaten by her husband, had taken an overdose of opium, in the certainty of thus being able to annoy him yet more effectually (and without being beaten) from the other side of the grave. Cakes and eggs in elegant parcels were the parting present he brought in to us at dinner the night before we left, and in the morning it only remained to bid farewell to the Mandarin. As he had shown himself so specially cordial, it was considered proper that I myself should honour him by riding round in state to deliver my cards in person. So, while the mules were receiving their loads, off I duly proceeded, with Mafu on Spotted Fat in front of me, as Chinese etiquette commands.

In and out beneath the acacias, we wound our way through the labyrinths of the streets, up and down steps, and into the second enclosure of the town where the Yamun stands. Here I was prepared to deliver

the cards, but was met by an urgent invitation to come in, instead of the formal acceptance which was all that the situation demanded. So in some trepidation as to the behaviour of the white horse and of myself, I rode clattering and clanking up the various flights of stone stairs that lead from court to ascending court of the Yamun, till at last I reached the barn-like hall of justice beyond which no one may ride. Here, then, I alighted, wondering how I should ever descend all those flights of steps again without peril to my equipoise; behind into the inmost court I was conducted, and there on the threshold met in a low bow by His Excellency, a charming-mannered middle-aged gentleman with a reminiscence of Cardinal Richelieu. Mutually saluting and smiling, we went in; but, alone as I was, with only the Mafu to support me, my own part in the dialogue consisted only of smiling becks and bows over my cup of tea, while the Mafu, standing in a lower place, embroidered suitably on my inadequate compliments. The scene was short and sweet; I was glad to bring it soon to an end, pleading the imminence of our start. Not till we got outside the main hall would the Mandarin let me go; then we turned face to face for the profound final bow of leave-taking, and on to the white horse I mounted with what majesty I might, from the saddle swept an elegant salute, and without any misadventure came riding out down the stone stairs from court to court with such an air as made me think of Alexander on Bucephalus proceeding in triumph down the palace precincts of Persepolis.

But prose was now our portion. All was ready for the start when I got back to the inn, and out of Wen Hsien the caravan wound westward, along above the river beneath the wall, where, on the sunbaked slopes,

the sweet mottled Iris was already in fat green pods. Ere long the track enters a wild and barren gorge, and the short first day's stage of forty li ends in a pleasant small village, above a huge bay of reclaimed shingle from the Whitewater, with a steep lifeless hill uprising behind, thickly studded with coffins of the dead. We had a long jangle here for accommodation, which told us that we were indeed coming into wild parts, unaccustomed to the traveller. Not even our escort from the Wen Hsien Yamun could prevail on the landlady, who was not even impressed by our own personal soldier, a new acquisition picked up in Wen Hsien on his own particular prayer, and the Lao-ya's consent and our own men's assurance (of recent date and probably purchased), that he was a "Hao-rŭn" (a good man). The description flattered him, and we could not wonder that the moral effect upon the landlady was nil. For he was a tatterdemalion shock-headed scoundrel, was Old Mee, with a broad and copiously pitted countenance; his chief charms were the expression of glutinous and dog-like devotion which he so well knew how to assume at need, and the comic bustling officialism with which he unconsciously parodied the typical Yamun underling from whom he had caught it. This was now brought to bear upon the present occasion, and in time the landlady, unable to hold out longer, was induced to remember that she had three excellent rooms, perfectly clean and new, down in the basement looking on the garden, instead of the dark and grimy hutch which was all she offered for our lordships upstairs. So at last we settled in and fed; then sallied up on to the torrid steep slopes behind, watched anxiously from below by the population assembled on the flat mud-roofs. But the ridge was

a mere desert of rocks and gravel and drought, and too dense with coffins for comfort; so down we went into the wide flat sweep by the river, there still to find nothing but the little azure Gentian in so glorious a peppering across that plain that all the fine sward was blue. The evening went swiftly by in prescribing for the many sick; though there was but little we could do for the landlord's unlucky brother, who seemed to be suffering from the puffy form of beri-beri. His legs were hugely swollen, and very little sensitive: you poked, and left a deep dent, which slowly puffed out again as if you had been poking some partially inflated india-rubber bag.

It is hardly possible to paint the utter desolation of these dry-land valleys of the Tibetan March. For days one may pursue the shores of a sullen river hedged in by high gaunt ranges bare and brown and hard as charity, filmed with scantiest sere herbage, on which the one flower is the Asphodel, like the reminiscence of a dead flame. The only oases are the villages lurking amid verdure delicious alike to eyes and nose. Yet even these are but poor little starving hamlets; for the greedy alps, now so close at hand, though wholly invisible as yet, cut off all the rainfall and the moisture from the lesser hills and their valleys, till wretched humanity is almost pinched out of existence. When we passed along the parched westerly reaches of the White-water there had been no rain in the region for four years past, and in the last three seasons of drought half of the population had died out quietly of sheer starvation, unwept, unhonoured and unsung. For Asia makes her tragedies on a grand scale and cares nothing for any of them great or small. Over-sensitised Europe, it seems, has now the lesson to learn that a few thousand

starved or slaughtered here and there make no great matter.

It was a skeleton country we traversed the next day, mournful and naked, and under a grey sky that seemed to promise the four-years-belated rain at last, in good time not to save the situation for those dead thousands. The valley widened gradually out and the hills grew dumpier, though always remaining of an aridness that suggested Aden. So that my heart beat high when I saw at length a lovely wide vale opening away from us down to the left toward Szechwan, among high forested mountains veiled in storm and streaked with snow. There, evidently, came the Whitewater; that way then, evidently, we must go. But no such thing. I could have cried when it became clear that we were now to bid farewell to the Whitewater, turn our backs on that wooded land of promise, and continue straight ahead, north-westwards up the desolate alpine-shingled bed of the Eastway River, a cold little ice-grey beck flowing between sterile shapeless hills. The day blew cold, the ridges vanished into cloud; once there was a pleasant peep, up to the right, beneath a pretty bridge into a wooded glen, barred at its head by a tremendous and almost precipitous wall of snow-streaked mountain, which gave us our first hint of the alps now really coming within our reach: I wondered if this might be the south side of the ridge below Kiai-jô, but the geography of all this region is of the most hopelessly vague description, and in such a surf of ranges one ridge is very like another. There were no new flowers; the plumy splendid Amphicome had been left behind within a few li of Wen Hsien, and though, seeing a spring bubbling up by the way amid cool-looking grass, I had mounted up there in search of Primulas, I found

only the invariable little Azure Gentian, but in such glory as amply made up for any disappointment.

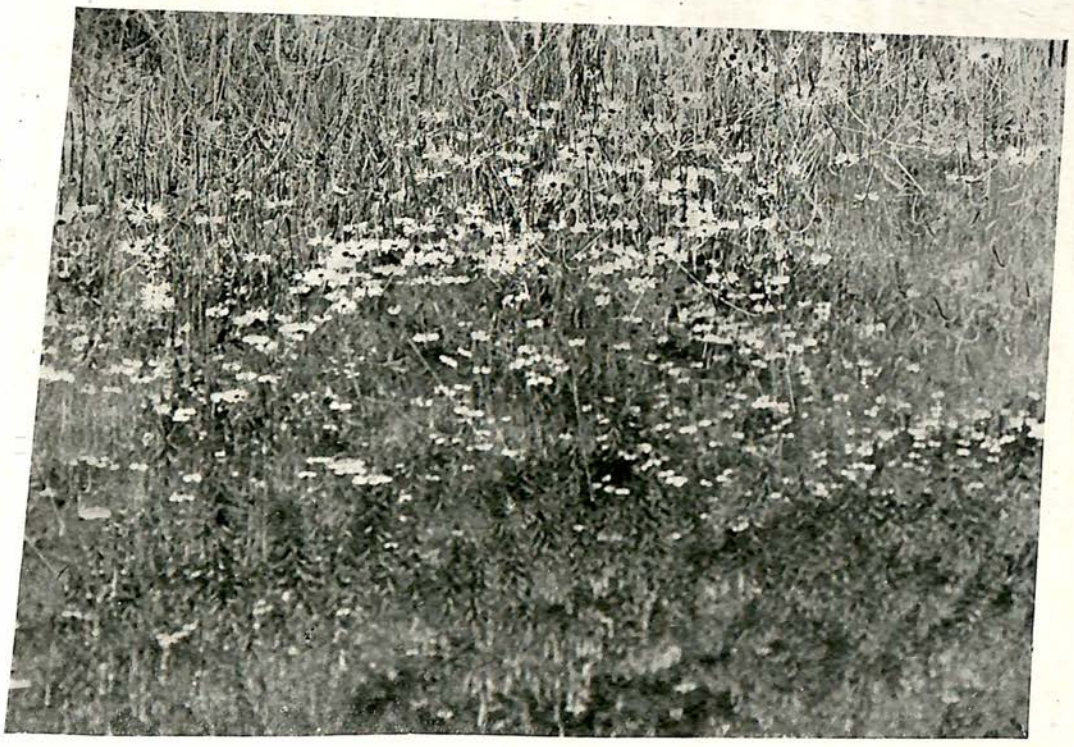
Still the day grew darker, and about four o'clock the four years' drought came at last to an end with our arrival. I hope that tardy rain may have refreshed the whitening bones that still would have been clothed in flesh if it had come a season or two sooner. At five we came to our stage at Tsung-Ling after a nine hours' stage of a good ninety li, and settled in to a large and airy upper room above the spacious court of the inn, the kind old landlord cheering our evening with a jorum of hot Chinese wine, the nastiest form of alcohol perhaps in the world, but certainly the most promptly warming to body and mind, and perhaps the most clean and wholesome. All night the rain continued heartily, and it seemed as if one could hear the dry skeleton stirring in its sleep. The next day's journey was as long as its predecessor, but seemed half, for the track wound up between narrowing mountains, with bigger heights occasionally glimpsed behind on either hand. The foothills were more and more verdant, less and less cultivated, with fresh snow on the uppermost forests of many, and, finally, at the end of the folded fells a gigantic white undulation half-way up the sky—the first highland of Tibet.

The air was alive and pregnant of marvels after the rain, the fields were filled with happy people agog with their first chance of successful cultivation in these long lean years. Busily they came and went and ploughed and sowed. I rode along in high contentment, and here at last made acquaintance with the titanic uncouthness of the yak, great patient hairy buffalo that he is, as you see him tamed to the plough. The beck becomes perceptibly more alpine as you advance, and in a bend

I alighted after a most beautiful little briar, of delicate tiny foliage and set all over with a dense profusion of tiny pearl-pink dog-roses. Encouraged by this, I next made a foray up into a steep oak-wood that descended on the right. The shade was delicious in the young heat of the day, but otherwise its slithering steeps of compost yielded nothing new. After this the journey steadily improves; the sere strips of attempted culture diminish, and finally fade away altogether; and up the lateral glens and over the lesser hills more and more frequently peer forested tall points clothed thickly in solemn and enormous firs, that tower amid a fleecy haze of umber and soft violet from the deciduous trees as yet in bud, while lower down the Oaks and Celtis are in the first flush of their emerald loveliness, and lower yet the Golden Rose* is in a blaze of loveliness unparalleled before, and Dipelta in arching hillocks of shell-pink, amid a crowded lesser fry of snowy Fringe-trees, flesh-pale Ribes, and orange Jew's Mallow, all in a riot of luxuriant colour, with rare Lilies thrusting up their stems occasionally in the jungle, and the virginal magnificence of *Pæonia Moutan* here and there refulgent in the more open places.

Pay here, then, your last respects to this memorable marvel; for never again (with me) will you set eyes on it wild in China. To make up, here greet, for the first and only time in my company, the little Ruthenian Iris, perhaps the farthest runagate of its race. For assuredly it is a far cry from Ruthenia to the North-Eastern Marches of Tibet; yet here are the small sapphire blossoms of the Iris, straying across a level heathy place of turf and scanty scrub above the beck, where gipsies have their camp, and making one think, although

* If *Rosa Xanthina* really exists, this is it.



ASTER FARRERI. "MY ASTER FILLED THE WHOLE SCENE"

so different, of the little violet flags of the Ground Iris as you see them straying through the short aromatic scrub about St. Raphael. And yet more fresh company do you meet on this last day of travelling towards Tibet.

For suddenly overhead, in the painted gateways of the road, you look up and salute the lords Buddhas and Bodhisattvas smiling down benignantly in glory, and know that now you are indeed in the precincts of the sacred and mysterious land, which no doubt, if not so difficult and remote, would prove no more sacred and mysterious than any other. But here they sit, the Holy Ones; and between them, in the central space of the roof-beam, is a vane like a turbine, painted with emblems, and perpetually revolving the words of aspiration to every breath of the wind. Left behind is the dry and sensible materialism of China, and here you enter the grip of the most tremendous mysticism, and the most materially organised, of any that still holds the fettered imagination of man. Salute, then, as you pass under their gateway and into their territory, these strange legendary shapes, these indefinitely multiplied mysterious forces, whose very presence here, and whose almost every function in the creed they have coagulated, is an insult to the memory of the Wholly Perfect One, and to the Truth that they have darkened through the ages with a multitude of counsels. Yet it is a moment of note, this, of entering upon a land where truth is apprehended at all, though no longer naked indeed, but disguised with load upon load of multifarious trappings.

We are now actually so far in Tibet as to be on the Prince of Jo-ni's property. His main sovereignty and his capital lie about twelve days' journey to the north,

but he, like many other of these petty sovereigns of the March, possesses various outlying territories, far from his central jurisdiction, and where, in fact, his authority goes no farther than the acceptance of an irregular tax, having occasionally paid which, the local prelates and peasants of these No-Man's Lands proceed to do precisely as they please, feeling quite secure that the Prince of Jo-ni will certainly not put himself to the trouble and expense of sending troops down all that distance to reduce a few wretched hamlets, whose inhabitants would long since have gotten themselves safe into the mountains before the soldiers came anywhere near the scene. Hence the evil temper of such places as Chago, confident in their remoteness, and with even their own acknowledged overlord so far away. Not until these isolated little plague-spots of unowned and unruled independence are finally merged in China, together with all the half-independent feudal sovereignties to which in theory they belong, will there be any sure guarantee for peace and prosperity up the Kansu March of Tibet.

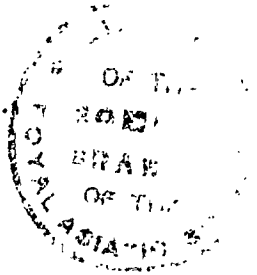
Long since have the Marches of the Koko-Nor been conquered, cajoled, and compromised into a good working system of law and order, where a tactful *laisser aller* alternates with displays of the strong slow hand of China. It only remains to do as much for the southward March, from Lanchow down to Wen Hsien; to insulate as far as possible the buzzing and perilous district of Mahomedan plottings and prosperity about Ho-jô; to tame or suppress the Abbey of Labrang, hidden so safely far away in the Alps of Kweite, and perpetually oscillating in disloyalty between the Mahomedans and the Tibetans; to absorb the territories of Jo-ni and Tan Chang, with all their outlying dependen-

cies; to suppress once for all the seditions of Kiai-jô; to establish an outpost at Chago or Ga-Hoba, and garrison impregnable Siku with the mere handful of well-equipped men who would easily be sufficient to make it the key of the whole southern March of Kansu. Thus, with a minimum of trouble and cost, at least as far as these regions are concerned, the hold of China along the March might easily be made firm, peaceful, and precise, though the controlling of the north, the reduction of Labrang, and the problem of the Mahomedans, are certainly large and difficult affairs; while the Prince of Jo-ni, an ambiguous young potentate, is now busily engaged in strengthening his position against his Chinese suzerain with the most suspicious coquettings between the Mahomedan leaders and the prelates of Labrang, with whom his quasi-sovereignty over his own royal Abbey of Jo-ni puts him into special relations.

Let these political speculations about these remote people introduce us to our first Tibetan inn at Second Look,* a dim-yarded, storied place, not, in fact, purely Tibetan, but wholly different from the Chinese style. The population was inquisitive, but not friendly; they refused to sell us anything, and their picturesque bedizened women were coy to all attempts at conversation. In the big lower room, smoky and dark, there was a noble open hearth, at which, for the first time since leaving England, I was able to enjoy the luxury of warming my feet at a fire, while in and out of the shadows ran gruntling and routing a tiny pet black pig, who was ultimately captured and put to bed in his basket like any puppy or kitten. Round the hearth gathered the staff, Rembrandtesque in the effects of the firelight, busily engaged in chat about Chago and other perils

* Di-er-kan.

of the way. It seems hard to realise that here we are now actually at the very foot of this elusive mountain that we have so long been chivying through the untracked wilds of Western China. To-morrow we dare the perils of the pass and the Abbey. The population talks of nothing else. Even here, just over the other side of the mountain wall, but in a country more tinctured with China, the place has an almost fabulously evil reputation; you would fancy that no Chinese could manage to pass through it without being burned alive in a bonfire of brushwood. It is quite certain, anyhow, that nobody does pass through it, except on the most urgent necessity, and then in bands of as many as can be got together. The tale was all of Chago and local broils; at Wen Hsien we had said farewell for weeks to the outer world behind us, and now for a long time all the happenings in China and elsewhere were to be a complete blank. Local politics, indeed, would anyhow have left us but little leisure to contemplate the huger disasters outside; but it seemed strange to us, afterwards, our acute preoccupation with our own affairs, our complete ignorance of the hideous storm that was now sweeping up behind us into Kansu from the south, along the very road we had so lately traversed, and from which we had now so felicitously diverged in the very nick of time.



CHAPTER VIII

CHAGOLA*

THE momentous day came up glorious and without a cloud. A little way farther we followed the course of the Eastway River, now clear as a green jewel; but in the rocky angle of a gorge it turned away and left us, winding south-west into the Marches of Szechwan. We crossed, and mounted a steep spur, to a little stone porch at the top, from which there was a memorable vista backwards over the river, the valley, and the village, smoking blue amid its verdure in the slanting early sunshine, with big hills and forests and high snows overtopping the dry downs of the glen. And then we turned away, down over the shoulder and along a hillside wooded in holm-oak, till we reached the depths of a ravine and struck away straight upwards to the right, beneath lovely hanging woods now blushing with scarlet and green and gold and crimson in a haze of spring rejoicing. Up and up, and up and up, the path almost as steep as a stairway, through more and more woodland glens, with glades of open grass and rosy Peonies sprouting amid the rocks. At last we came into a beck-bottom that was really alpine, enveloped in coppice, where the water purled gurgling through the brakes, and a crimson cuckoo-pint shone brilliant

* An edition of this chapter was lent to the Anglo-Chinese Friendship Society in Peking, for publication in its periodical.

among the sere stalks and the pale withered wreckage of last year's ferns. And then, far overhead, so sheer and high that it seemed impossible we should ever attain it, appeared the wall of Chagola itself, crested all along with snow. Upwards in coil over coil we wound, from pinnacle to ascending spur of the climb, and down below us sank deeper and deeper the cold forested folds of the hill where snow lay dappled chill on the pale moss-beds down among the lavender haze of the red birch, here a mere winter cobweb of deadness with no apparent hope of resurrection. Only the stately old spruces, crowded and sombre, that punctuated the skeleton pallors of the birch, gave a look of ominous and ancient life to the slopes.

Now the woodland was left below, and we embarked on the main climb, which ascends the wall of the pass in very short abrupt zigzags, much more ferocious than the ample and leisurely hairpins of the Alps. It was all grass, coarse at first and yellow with winter, but ere long growing more alpine with every yard one climbed. Life had hardly begun to awake on that Sixth of May. A little rue-buttercup twinked glistering many-rayed stars of bright snow at intervals in the dank black slopes of silt at the path-side, and we had our first sight of that tedious little ugly Anemone, like a small white buttercup itself, which is such a universal weed all the way up these borders at least as far as the alps of the Koko-nor. Meanwhile, looking back, we had real mountain-ranges at last to feast our eyes. Gradually over the intervening hills unfolded high and jagged splendours of rock and ice and snow; one behind the other arose the huge ranges, surging like the frozen foam of an arising Aphrodite from the surf of lesser masses at their feet, with the curving course of the

MILK-BUCKET OF RED BIRCH

Eastway notable far down into the south-western distance, and a level line of great mountains closing it in all along the horizon. We were now well up into the alpine zone; the turf was a fine brown sward, still soaked and sodden and dark from the winter; but the keen and glorious daylight seemed to be calling up life out of it every moment in a magic exhalation of the awakening hillside. The breath of the mountain had a sharp and mystic sweetness, heady and aromatic, almost like that heady aromatic fragrance of the mountain clover which sweeps across the brown highlands of the Cottians and Graians in the spring, like a breath of etherealised fairy wine. All over the slopes a big Narcissus Anemone was sprouting in myriads of fluffy tuffets, but the only other flower that promised yet was another rue-buttercup, whose large daisy-like blooms lay helpless on the ground, sodden with late storms, and apparently chilled to a cold and chilblainy blue. For now we were actually in the limit of the late storms, and all the hill was a solid sheet of melting snow, in the laps of which it was just possible to discover the dank wide wads of a perennial Meconopsis, from the heart of whose rosettes were pushing the hairy globules of green that were to be the shoots of the year.* Otherwise, the crest was a white wilderness, in which stood up the black skeleton seed-heads of various louseworts, but nowhere of any Primula; all the forest lay far away below us now, and at these heights there was only a scanty coppice of big Rhododendron in the dells, gaunt and scraggy, with a heathery scrub of wee Potentilla and wee Rhododendrons giving such a heathered effect to the open hillside that at any moment one expected grouse to rise and scatter with their harsh metallic

* Beyond a doubt *M. quintuplinervia.*

whirr. And so at last, in an ecstasy with the day and the air and the alps, we achieved the long ascent, and stood on the very neck of Chagola, looking down upon its northern wall and out across the whole plan of the Kansu-Tibetan March.

I do not know of any view in our own mountains that can compare with this sudden revelation. It is like nothing I remember, at once much more episodic and much more regular than any effect in the European Alps. For these Tibetan ranges descend to China in so well-arranged a series of parallel sweeps that here, on the neck of one chain, you are looking far out across the intervening folds of hill and down and forest to another exactly opposite your own. And also, away to the left, one behind another, you see the successive links of the chain on which you yourself are standing, rising up in isolated masses, seen end-on, with the effect of a series of gigantic icebergs floating on a faintly rippled ocean that is the forested hill-country round their feet; while in front of you, perfectly straight and regular, rises the long stark wall which is the last westerly effort of the Min S'an, culminating in the stupendous mass which we shall learn to know as Thundercrown,* with other masses behind it and behind it away to the left, till the eye loses itself in that archipelago of titanic ice-islands which is Eastern Tibet. You are looking out, too, into a country wholly different from what we have left. Here are no bony barren valleys, no loess desolations of ochre, but the sides of the mountains fall away into steep over steep of dense and ancient forest, down in the deep heart of which roars the ice-grey little torrent of the Satanee Hor; while all the intervening hills between range and range are mollified

* Lei-gor S'an.

by the influence of the big ranges into clothing themselves with vegetation and woodland. From the crest of Chagola you can luxuriate in the glories of a typically alpine country.

Not the faintest notion can you form that away out there, beneath the very feet of Thundercrown, you will meet once more the Blackwater, storming down a blazing valley as dry and sere as that in which you left it. All the finer mountains, in fact, are away and away, like fair Inez, into the west; you might have guessed that from the comparative proximity of Chagola to Chinese districts and influence. There is, of course, no border between China and Tibet, no neatly defined line with outposts and douanes; but China gently fades as the mountains become more and more unnegotiable and unprofitable, and here you are at the first point where the Central Asiatic ranges begin to be really tiresome and distasteful to the Chinese. Both the Satanee Alps, in fact, and the Min S'an, are dying ranges at this point, where China begins to take possession; almost abruptly they sink eastward into the downlands of Western Kansu. Immediately above you now, on the right, towers the naked leonine head of limestone which is the last outbreak of the Satanee range. (You may call it Chagoling if you want a name, Chagola being the right Tibetan word for a pass, while the Chinese "ling," for pass or mountain, seems to be of less precise application.) In the same way, Thundercrown is the last spasm of the Min S'an, after which, in a higher and more magnificent wall than this of Chagoling, the range continues hardly any farther eastward than this, severed between its final vertebræ by the deep cutting of the Nan Hor, which the enfeebled spine is no longer able to resist.

The northern face of Chagola is very different from the southern. As soon as you are sated with the glory of that prospect and the dazzling air, you sink immediately into a black midnight of tortured matted old spruces and glossy tree Rhododendrons, gnarled and coagulated with the storms and snows of this grim elevation, and even now heavy with snow that in their depths is still an unbroken deep bed. The track descends with vertiginous abruptness; it is like nothing so much as a sheer cataract of ice and snow in the desolate darkness of that jungle. Down and down the ice-shoot we slither and slide and flounder. It was best not to think of the mules and ponies descending behind us; but on they faithfully came, all difficulties notwithstanding, sitting down to a glissade where the ice was more than usually sheer and impracticable. Gradually the firs gained ground over the Rhododendron, and increased in stature; the snow continued very far down in the fastnesses of that solemn primeval forest, where no breath stirred in the dense stillness, ultimately and gradually turning to a slough of unutterable slush. There are no flowers in that dark night; there is only a little pale dead thing like a ghost that has been sodden for years in water. Until, turning a corner, I suddenly gave tongue upon the first of our flowering Primulas.*

In the mossy bank it gleamed and glittered here and there, and in the dappled darkness of the forest its amethystine pinkness seemed to shine like so many stars of soft flame. I did not revel in it the less, either, because it so exactly recalled to me a big primrose or oxlip, its sturdy stems, each unfolding a loose head of big flowers daintily lilac-rose in colour, with an elaborate ten-rayed eye of white diffusing from the greenish

* *P. hylophila*, sp. *nova*.

throat. It was like a primrose, too, in its tastes, growing copiously in just the same places, in rich woodland soil, and especially on trunks of long-fallen and quite rotten timber, all down the track-side, and in all the more open woodland glades and at the edges of the coppice in this region, between some five to nine thousand feet. We were lucky to see its beauty, for only here, at its topmost extension, was it still lingering in bloom, and when we reached the region of its main abundance lower down in the woods there were none of the pink stars still shining, but stout little green scapes standing up in seed, with the stem of each separate flower in the head so swollen and stiff that they made the effect of so many outstanding trumpets of palest green swelling to the five-toothed mouth of the calyx. It had no scent when I saw it, but that, perhaps, may have been the result of the recent storm; nothing could have appreciably added to the charm of its beauty, and I was in a continual course of raptures as I came floundering down the interminable mud-slides and sloughs of that coiling path, perpetually, as we descended more and more into the region of deciduous trees, delighting in a richer and richer abundance, in all the opener places, of that cheery little lovely primrose, springing everywhere from its crinkly primrose-like starfishes of foliage, crisp as lettuce, and clothed in an almost microscopic and invisible coat of dense emerald-green fur. None of its race, in fact, has more fascinating foliage, even apart from the bloom; even in late autumn it is always with fresh joy that you see its crumpled star unfurling from the mossy face of some long-rotten tree-trunk across your path.

So we had our fill of the Wood-nymph, sparkling at us from all the banks as we came. We were not the only

people on the road, though it was a marvel to meet, even on that last appalling piece at the top of the pass, whole ascending trains of wretched carriers, staggering painfully upwards, bowed down beneath huge burdens of meal and flour that they were conveying over to the starving dry valleys of the Eastway. It shows the desperation of that luckless land, that provisions should find it worth while to undertake so arduous and wild a journey. The descent of that first wall from Chagola brings you down through all the alpine zones of woodland, from the chaos of storm-driven Rhododendrons at the top, through that in which enormous firs and pines stand motionless above the gloom of the jungle, down to the dappled glades and spring-coloured undulations of the deciduous woodland; finally, the track debouches into a most beautiful alpine plain of grass, from which several converging glens, now so many rolling seas of lavender and tenderest green and pink and gold with the approach of spring, lead up into the fastnesses of the naked rocks that look so impregnably sheer and far overhead that it seems impossible you can so immediately have come down from such heights.

Here, according to their unvarying habit, the "boys," in a minute or two, had a cheerful bonfire blazing on the sward, and, as its blue smoke went coiling up against the background of hazy forest, we ourselves rejoiced in the prospect of a camping centre so ideal in every respect. Certainly a good part of our summer should be spent in this green little vale of peace, that afforded such good access to so many portions of the range; no doubt we could get on to terms with the people of Chago for our supplies, and all would be well. So murmured hope; meanwhile, we sauntered and browsed about amid the peaceful beauties of the spot, enraptured by our

first sight of the universal sky-blue Fumitory* of these ranges, which was here sprouting amid the shingles of the beck, and astounded us with its intense blazing azure. The floor of the woodland, too, was a surf of snowy wood anemones, that seemed to dance in the flickering lights and shades.

Now it was time to proceed. The track led onward through an immemorial stretch of flat woodland. The ground was an unbroken snow-starred carpet of wood anemones, beneath the soft green light that filtered through the vast entangled tree-trunks overhead, whose branches made an interarching canopy looped up with ferns. It seemed a very ancient watchful place, haunted with silence; the long furry boughs reached down everywhere towards us like monstrous arms of apes. The windless green calm, the profound stillness of the forest, were indescribably solemn and soothing. Common among the Anemones was Pachysandra, in its ordinary wild leathern green form, as common as dog's mercury and quite as ugly; and here and there the brown and bronzy mounds of the giant lily broke the level, here rather poor, but becoming more common as we descended. The Wood-nymph Primula, now gone quite out of flower, accompanied us in abundance, and the brilliant purple cuckoo-pint, blazing here and there in the dark distances of the coppice, was always getting itself mistaken for its betters, and especially for some new Primula of notable brilliancy and port. The gentle descent gradually grew wilder, though; and we began dropping more steeply through a narrowing gorge of high precipices, choked with vast old boulders clothed in moss, where yet another woodland Primula was just beginning to uncoil its leaves from their winter sleep.

* *Corydalis curvioflra.*

In a tangled riot the aged Rhododendrons wove arbours above our heads, and in the moss amid the boulders shone the greenish-golden orbs of an Adonis. Wilder and wilder grew the gorge, steeper and rockier the track; the way seemed endless, till in a damp moss cushion close at hand we saw a budding Primula whose mealy leaves showed clearly a different species. Evidently it was a strayed outlier from some main colony, which I now accordingly set myself to discover. But it was not till I had climbed a hundred feet or so, up a ruin of fallen boulders covered in brown moss, that on the damp precipice above I saw the glinting rosy-purple of the Rock-nymph Primula. Here, though, she was poor and frail in growth, with scanty inferior flowers, and we shall nowhere see her full beauty except on the dark rockwalls of the Bastion Gorges opposite Satanee.*

Gradually, now, the woodland thinned out and the descent grew calm; flowers of lower levels appeared, more and different wood anemones, abundance of the giant lily, a coppiced tangle of Spiræas, and numbers of a most beautiful thing which is called the dusky Disporon, because its long hanging bells of blossom, in loose clusters on six-inch stems, are of the most ravishing waxy white, recalling little Lapagerias or gigantic Solomon's seals. At last even the lower coppice tailed away, and we came out into open fields, rounding and rounding the long bays of the descent. Stalwart Tibetans, clothed in what looks like ancient sacking, were urging their yaks in front of the plough, and evidently we were now down in the culture zone, and out of hope of any more Primulas in this fat land of tillage and hedgerows. Hardly had I said the word than I turned my head, and on a bank above a little rill beheld

* *P. scopulorum*, sp. *nova*.

the very Primula of which I had just so reasonably despaired. I was so far right, though, that the Bank-side Primula* does not suggest being a wild plant, nor at all an alpine; it is a small poor cousin of the vicious *P. obconica*, and not a thing of merit, of value, or any eminent beauty—although, be it never so humble, a Primula is always a Primula, and as such to be venerated, even if its flowers be small and mean and magenta like the squinny little stars of *P. riparia*.

The Mafu and the Mee had long since ridden on ahead to secure us lodgings at Chago; we ourselves began to wonder if we should ever arrive at this singularly evasive place. The glorious day was drawing on to a calm and radiant evening, and still at each brow of the hill we only saw another below us like the last. Very far up behind us now rose the forested wall of Chagola, with the bare precipice of the mountain looming overhead. The stream of the gorge now deserted us, and went plunging down in deep wild cañons of woodland far below, while we ourselves continued breasting the fell sides, and leisurely descending between hedges all ablow with pear. Finally, for the last straw of the day, we had a long and unexpected rise out of the glen by a coppiced bank to a rocky headland, turned the corner beneath a stone porch, and came suddenly into full view of Chago, not a mile away, lying round the last bay of the hill, with its abbey squatting out beyond on the headland, from which the mountain side evidently fell finally now to the far-off invisible depths of the Satanee Hor.

Two tracks led on to Chago. One was a high, steep, and stony climb that ascended right round the whole cirque of the hillside; the other was smooth and short and pleasant, cutting straight across it through the

* *P. riparia*, sp. *nova*.

sprouting fields of corn. Never noting that Purdom and the mules were gratuitously choosing the high and difficult course, the Go-go and I embarked immediately on the low and easy one, making short work of a bunch of brushwood that lay across the entrance to the track. We had hardly advanced half a dozen yards, though, ere I was aware of a buzzing in the village ahead of me, and howls and hoots. I was paying no attention to these, and certainly putting none of them to my account, when I found myself being urgently reclaimed by Purdom, and bidden to follow in that upper way. Not only in the sphere of morals is the high and stony way more recommendable than the short and smooth. It seems that in the season of the sprouting corn the Tibetans of the March, conscious that their living margin is very small, and that the least accident of weather may beggar them for a year, in half an hour of hail, hedge round the hopes of their budding crops with an intricate network of taboos. This must not be done, that not be said, such and such a path on no account be trodden, during the period of peril, on pain of wakening the anger of the powers that be against the corn and the cattle. Inadvertently, then, I had been straying on to one of these forbidden paths, open to pedestrians, indeed, but not to ponies, and had thus innocently played exactly the part I could least have wished, in provoking the enmity of Chago against us from the very start.

Not understanding this at present, it was in a sore mood, after so long a day, that I returned into the high and stony path; not even a most charming little dainty honeysuckle* bush, with showers of dropping rosy trumpets all along its flattened sprays of tiny leaves,

* *Lonicera Farreri*, sp. *nova*.

could quite banish my sense of grievance, as still we toiled upwards round the encircling hills, and so down at last upon Chago, a shingled huddle of grey chalets along the headland, as if it had been some village of the Italian Alps.

A tired mule had just fainted in the track ahead of me, and the consequent block and delay put the coping-stone on my annoyance. It was long after Purdom's own arrival that I and the weary caravan came winding down into Chago, and up a lane knee-deep in the black mud of ages, to where dense crowds of assembled people indicated that some sort of lodging awaited us. It was my first sight of a true Tibetan crowd, and with innocent interest I scanned their stately forms and big-boned faces. These were people of a very massive type, crude giants compared with the Chinese to whom one had grown accustomed. Sacking was the common wear, and many of the burly forbidding-looking women wore upon their breasts immense charms and circular amulet-boxes of silver or brass containing texts or charms, or relics of saint or Buddha. Here and there among them loomed the dim purple of a monk and his austere round head. And they all stared hard in a dark and non-committal manner; one young monk alone gave me a friendly smile.

We shall probably never know what exactly did happen before our arrival, and whether any rashness was perpetrated by the Mafu or the Mee to crystallise the unsettled evil mood of the Chagolese towards strangers in general into a particular and definite hostility towards our unfortunate selves. Long, long afterwards there floated a tale, handed down through a lengthy descent of repetitions, that one of them had made some trouble, and insisted on a welcome being prepared for

us. Neither of the officious Yamun-trained Mee nor of the rough-and-ready Mafu would such an action be wholly improbable. All we can say is that we gave them strictest orders to be as conciliatory as possible to the villagers, and that the Mafu, at least, knew perfectly well the vital importance of being so in such circumstances; also that, at the time, no complaint of any sort was made, nor was there the smallest sign of any trouble having arisen. Be this as it may, our reception at Chagola was blackly and sullenly unfriendly from the very first, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that accommodation had been arranged for us for the night. Buying was impossible, the people would not even answer a question, and if occasionally some bluff giant seemed less disinclined for pleasantness than the rest, his grim sulky wife would pluck him by the sackcloth sleeve and immediately scold him out of all notion of such civilities.

Not quite aware of the situation and its full difficulties, I passed into the dark central hall and sat down at the hearth. The people of the house gathered round, and while the man was not unreconcilable, his two large dingy women eyed us with unconcealed dislike, and withered every attempt at conversation with an impenetrable sulkiness. In the middle of these overtures, too, it was discovered that I was drying my boots on the throne of the Hearth Spirit, which did not tend to improve matters. But now flowed in upon the scene such a flood of monks as filled the hall to overflowing. At their head came the Prior, primed with questions and thoroughly suspicious and unfriendly. We had to undergo a most exhaustive catechism on our actions, intentions, and motives; none of our answers carried any conviction. How could they? How is a Tibetan

monk to understand anybody's voluntarily coming so far after useless weeds? It is perfectly plain to him that this pretence merely masks the search for gold, which is the present monopoly of the Church, and protected accordingly with all the legends and taboos by which the monks can guard the solitude of the alps, and not only prevent the peasant from prowling up there himself, but also reinforce all his rage against strangers, who, by doing so, will surely bring the wrath of Heaven on the village that has allowed them thus to affront the powers of the air. And if foreigners come here after gold, they will certainly soon be followed by other foreigners with fire and sword, escorting alien creeds and discords, attacking the inviolable authority of the Church alike in this world and the next. Perish the thought! The Church and its flock see eye to eye on the point, for not even the Catholic Church is so much at one with its people as the Lamaist, where at least one son taken from every family for the monastic life welds the whole Tibetan population, secular and lay, into an indissoluble community of sympathies and interests. A peasant boy of Central Europe *may* become a monk or a priest; from every household of Tibet one boy, to say no more, *must* become a priest and a monk. Hence the enormous solidarity of Lamaism, and its profound intimate hold on the people with whom it is thus intertwined.

The Prior accordingly proceeded grimly with his catechism, to an accompaniment of growls from the dark recesses of the room behind. One felt that every answer only made a blacker impression than its predecessor. They denied possession of an Abbot, a bad sign in itself, and not even our cards duly sent up to the Presiding Elder produced much relaxation. Gra-

dually, however, as the dialogue continued, a certain thawing seemed to appear. The news of my own creed made a certain effect, and I was proclaimed as a sort of Western Lama engaged in procuring Tibetan flowers to beautify the shrines of Europe. This thin tale was listened to with more attention than the rest, and was followed by an invitation to me to come up to service to-morrow. I accepted this with bows, and presented the Prior with candles and a book of pictures. Distinctly mollified in manner he turned to go, and all his train followed after, leaving us with the pleasing notion that we had now smoothed over our difficulties most successfully and made ourselves really popular. Hugging this happy idea we sat and made plans, and praised the Prior for a prudent and friendly person. And meanwhile this estimable ecclesiastic was busily issuing a proclamation that we were all to be murdered in the night with as little fuss and unpleasantness as might reasonably be. Unconscious of these tokens of friendliness in preparation, we ourselves retired to sleep. I had a tiny little room off the main hall, while Purdom and the boys arranged their rolls of bedding on various of the big lockers that ran all round the three sides of the hall, each with a smaller lower one in front of it convenient for rolling off onto.

We had ample leisure, through that long night, for wondering what curious scrabblings those might be that went on through the small hours round the outer walls. In point of fact, they were the work of the pious peasantry endeavouring to get into the house and carry out the Prior's prescription without drawing too much attention to the fact. There was evidently a peace party in the place—of which, indeed, we found subsequent and satisfactory evidence; if the job could

be put through quietly and silently and anonymously, well and good, but the Prior and his following had no desire to affront the weaker vessels of his flock with open bloodshed. We, however, ignorant of these intricacies, consumed the darkness in wonderings, whenever the onslaughts of the bugs left an interval. I, indeed, aloft on my camp-bed, suffered comparatively little, but Purdom and the boys were so ceaselessly assaulted that finally they gave up all pretence of slumber, cast aside their bedding, and finished the night astride on the mule-packs in the middle of the floor.

On our grey mood the dawn came grey and weeping: Chagoling and Chagola had retired into an impenetrable veil of cloud and rain. No further sign of hostility was shown, but we were left quite alone, and it was a bad omen that none of the inhabitants either cared or dared to satisfy their natural curiosity by coming to see us, if it were only to ask for some pill of medicine. The two bun-faced women of the house, engrained in the filth of many years, sat and made a whispered conversation together by the hearth, and refused either notice or answer to all our efforts, shutting us off into a more rigid isolation than ever. If more urgently spoken to they feigned sickness, and sighed and grumped and faintly groaned, declining speech, immediately afterwards returning to the eager sibilations of their own *tête-à-tête*.

Our morning passed in the dismal task of trying to rid ourselves of unwelcome visitors. The bug is an unlovely beast. There is a certain humanity about the flea, who always reminds me of a brisk little curate hopping round after subscriptions. But the bug, obese and squalid, is more like some horrible old blood-sucking Mrs. Warren in decline, waddling with a fat slow sure-

ness towards her unholy purposes. Even her death lacks the odour of sanctity. And in Tibetan houses the bug abounds. Beware, all along the Border, of villages where the room-fittings are of wood. The lœss lands give you complete immunity, but where there is woodwork, with crevices and cracks, there you will do well to hedge yourself about betimes with oilcloth, and take refuge on the safe elevation of a camp-bed. For with the development of darkness, forth from all the chinks and cavities march phalanxes of bugs, the progeny of many generations established, like county families, in the immemorial grime and darkness of those uninvestigated cavities. Their name is legion, so, probably, are their species, and I make little doubt that an entomologist could do much profitable searching in his shirt after one night of a Tibetan house. Even the flea is not our old familiar friend. There is a legend that once a Rothschild offered ten thousand pounds for a specimen of the white Tibetan flea. Alas and alas! on the morning after my arrival at Chago I might have become a millionaire at that rate; for assuredly "ten thousing times ten thousing" would have been the value of the game I bagged in my own coverts—strange little pearly diaphanous things, like minutest white grains of corn, each with a black bloblet in the middle which is their belly, darkened with its burden of one's own blood.

In these scientific researches the hours were consumed, and we concluded not to face a second night downstairs, but to retire to the big hayloft up above, where the gaping shingles and the wilderness of accumulated hay could not weigh against its blessed security from vermin. After lunch I set to work diagnosing yesterday's hawl of Primulas, while Purdom, more

energetic, went out for a walk in the mournful wet up towards the hill at the back, where a mass of purple lilac flared from afar amid the copse. When my task was ended I sank into a doze, from which I was stirred by occasional violent and prolonged howls in the street outside, which I took to proceed from pedlars or some such passer-by. But at last these so increased in number and volume that I was completely roused, and went out to the stairway-head of the loft to see what it might all be. About a quarter of a mile away, on the hillside, I saw that the meeting-place of the village was crowded with burly figures in sackcloth, leaping and hopping and bounding in a sort of demoniac dance, to an accompaniment of wild yells irregularly but constantly emitted. I watched this spectacle with an innocent ethnological interest. Clearly these good people were celebrating the spring or the crops in this quaint primeval rite; those disorderly jumpings and that choir of dissonant howls aroused in me quite a pang of emotion, as I sat and realised that just from some such ritual must the drama originally have been born. Pursuing the train of these elevating thoughts, I was planning an article on the primitive practices of Tibetan nature-worship, when I was suddenly awakened to the realities of life by pale and shaking voices that summoned me in whispers to descend from my exposed post of observation. Thunderclapped out of my meditations, I swiftly and silently crept downstairs.

I found the big room full of stir and turmoil, and soon learned the truth of that interesting demonstration on the hill. For Purdom, it seems, accompanied by the Go-go, had been discerned quite peacefully proceeding along the pathway up the hill behind the village. It was an open path, without any taboo, but the Prior

evidently thought this a good opportunity to carry out his purpose of yesterday night, now that the force of the foreigners was divided. Accordingly, as Purdom strolled, he was hailed from behind with an increasing pandemonium of howls, and, turning, saw all the male population of the village gathered in a disorderly mob, with arquebuses at rest and fuses lit, in the obvious intention of shooting him then and there. To pause would have been fatal, for the Tibetan, though useless at a moving mark, is a dead shot at a still one; flight up the hill would have been useless, besides abandoning his base. It only remained to turn round and proceed back to the village, passing the gauntlet of the mob. It so happened that that day, for the first and only time in our travels, he had gone out without so much as a revolver.

Armed only, then, with his fascinating smile, and with hands thrown wide to show his harmlessness, he braced himself to face those smoking guns and that howling horde of demons. Down the path he steadily came, with the Go-go giggling at his heels, and thinking it all a fine joke; in an avenue on either hand, banked up along the hedgerow, the villagers gnashed and bellowed upon him as he came, with faces and gestures so devilish that it was long before they deserted his dreams. But it was probably the very absence of the revolver that sufficed to turn the hair-balance of the situation, and avert yet another of those Tibetan tragedies that come and pass in the twinkling of an eye, arising in an instant, and in an instant determining, for life or death. For the peace party was not unrepresented in that crowd, and Purdom's unarmed condition gave them a chance of pressing home their point, and insisting on the insanity of destroying anyone so obviously in-

offensive, whose destruction would assuredly in time attract the notice of China to Chago in a most undesirable manner. Accordingly, they managed to hold the situation poised; the least untoward incident would have precipitated matters, and our expedition would have ended, at its very beginning, in a sudden flare like those which accounted for Brooke and Margary and Dutreuil de Rhins. Fortunately, the nice balance held; a young monk outpoured smooth words on the howling sea, an old patriarch held out hands of peace to Purdom, and a venerable grandam urged him most unconvincingly to have no fear. So, supported from point to point, he passed at last through the peril and left it behind him. Resisting all temptations to dwell on those guns now pointing at him from the rear, any one of which might fire at any moment, he preserved a proper dignity of pace, and with unhastening step and deliberate pantomime of pipe-lighting, proceeded indifferently homeward, and arrived unscathed.

Even now, of course, it was obvious that the situation was by no means saved. In fact, the most critical moments might now be at hand. So we put the house in the best posture for defence, posted the boys and primed our weapons, and were prepared to do or die as the case might demand. Furious at having let their prey escape, we thought it possible that now the villagers might try to rush the place *en masse*. But when, after an uneasy ten minutes, we were at last invaded, it was not by murderers, but by monks, who swept into the room in a tumultuous flood. Among them came the young monk, claiming merit for having saved Purdom's life—a claim I am not wholly inclined to disallow; and this time the monastery did produce an Abbot, who, however, added little to the conversation, being a small-

pocked young shock-headed Peter, frowzy and stockish, stupid in face, squat in figure, and of a generally toad-like conformation. A deafening pandemonium ensued. Evidently the murder party, having failed of its object, had now retired completely out of existence, for the talk was all of peace and love and friendliness; never was there a warmer esteem and affection than that in which, as it now appeared, we were held by all that holy brotherhood. In a loud unanimous gabble, however, they deplored their inability to impress the same views on their lawless and obstinate parishioners. Convinced though they themselves were of our exhaustive virtues, it was impossible to get the agreement of the village on this point. In fact, in plainer words, these protesting people no longer dared to desire our deaths, but were quite determined on our departure. For the sum of all they said was that we should be best advised to clear off as soon and as quietly as possible, so as no more to affront the susceptibilities of the village; and henceforth rigidly avoid these mountains and their peoples.

It was a depressing but unanswerable manœuvre. It was not possible for anyone to establish themselves in that district against the declared ill-will of the population and the professed inability of the Church to control it. Sooner or later there is bound to be trouble—trouble with the people, trouble with the monks, and trouble, ultimately, for China and the Legations. Even if you have the inclination and the force of arms, you cannot impose yourself on the Tibetans permanently with guns and rifles; they are a tenacious and irreconcilable race, as excellent in craft and patience as in open attack. The largest and best-armed expeditions do well to treat them with extreme care, while a small

one, helpless and unofficial, has no choice whatever but to follow the wind of Tibetan public opinion. Accordingly, with gloom in our hearts, we prepared to take the advice of the monks, ironical though it was, for all parties concerned knew perfectly well that they, and they alone, were the real masters and origins of the situation, however glibly they might deplore their powerlessness to restrain the popular animosity that they themselves had kindled and assuredly meant to maintain. There was no help for it; in preparation for an early and untroubled start we retired betimes to the hay-loft, having carefully enjoined the muleteers, on danger of provoking perhaps a fatal riot such as is so apt to spring up at a moment's notice in the tortuosities of a Tibetan street, to bring round their animals in the first dawn as quietly as might be, without the usual jangling caparison of bells. To which, impressed with the urgency of the occasion, they consented, and we then made ourselves couches in the hay and curled up, our bedding being packed ready for the start.

No one who knows Chinese muleteers will need to be told, accordingly, that the day was well up, and we ourselves had been waiting impatiently for some hours, before the mules did at last arrive, and even then it was with a full-throated jangle of all their bells that must have roused every Tibetan within a mile. No, whatever danger pressed in the visible world, nothing was to deprive those mules of their protection against those of the spiritual one, nor drag their c ners a moment sooner from the warm comfort of their bed. However, Chago was like a silent place of the dead as we threaded its muddy streets in the breathless radiance of the morning. We had forecasted stonings and op-

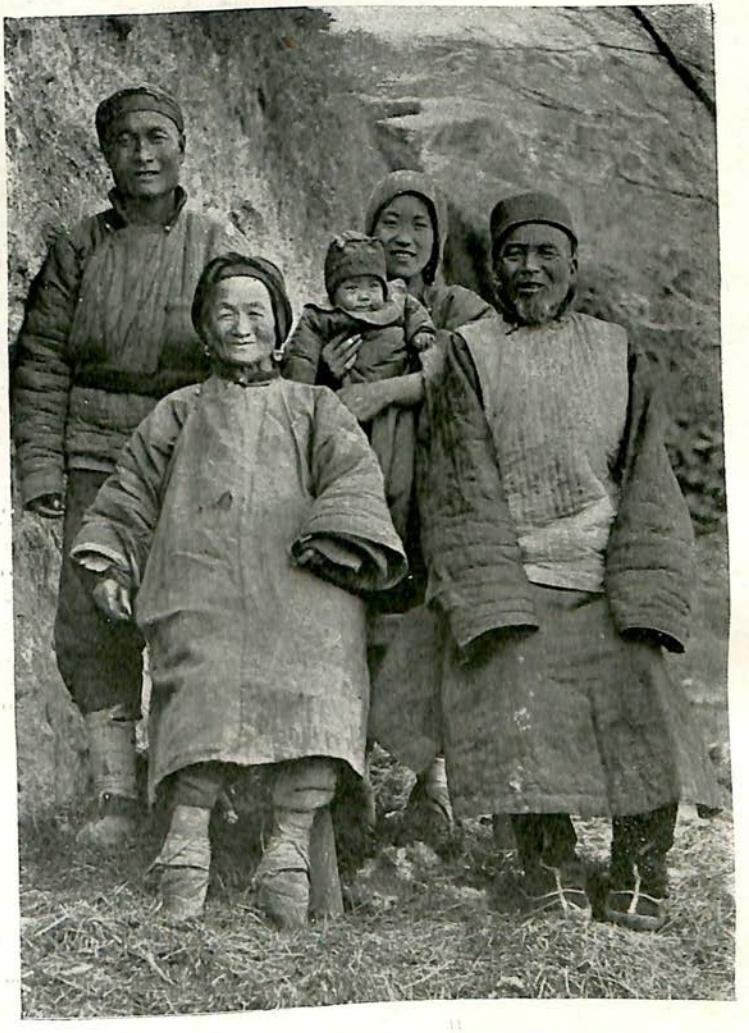
probrium, and perhaps even a rear attack, as we descended the slope below the village. And a few loud whoops that preceded our departure from some inner alley put us, indeed, on the alert; but the alarm was followed by no overt act, and even here and there we met a bland smile as we defiled through the lanes, until at length we were out of Chago, embarked on the long descent of the mountain-side to the depths of the Satanee Hor. At a very gradual downward slant goes the track, winding round and round the various bays and brows of the hillside, straight towards the mountains that we had scanned so longingly from the crest of Chagola. The scene was more glorious than ever, for now we commanded the whole course of the Satanee Hor, that flowed in the depths beneath us, a thread of ice-grey torrent between steep sombre slopes of forest. Far ahead towered these gigantic fairy castles of ice and snow, arrayed one behind the other, crowned with the radiance of the early sun, while deep in shadow still lay the steep walls of woodland in which they fell away to the windings of the river-course below. It was a morning of crystal glory; the very air seemed to sparkle, and the many-folded snow masses were blinding against the blue as we descended the alpine brows of the hill amid a coppice of Dipelta, here seen for the last time in flower, and here at its very zenith of magnificence, forming real trees drooping and bowed beneath the unbroken burden of their blossom.

Down and down the track I walked, with the Mee attendant treading closely on my heels in the irritating fashion prescribed by Chinese etiquette. On one little dewy bank of the coppice I saw a multitude of the Bankside Primula, looking fairy-like and pretty in that sylvan haunt; and a pearly white Peony was pushing

its globular flowers here and there. Then the broad laps of culture grew more and more numerous, and we found ourselves at last arrived beside the river. By a little wooden bridge we crossed, and then continued up its farther side, still advancing intrepidly towards the alpine heights which now seemed to close in half the sky away up at the valley's head; at which sight I more and more rejoiced, until I was aware that immediately in front of each peak, standing out on some pinnacle from the hillside, squatted on guard a white-walled, dark-roofed little monastery, frowning away all strangers from those sacred heights. At that sight I swung back into gloom, and was hardly consoled by a haze of lavender blue away ahead of me above the path, which proved a big bush of the grey flannel Buddleia paradoxically strayed into this cool alpine district, and therefore still in flower long after all its brothers in the dry lands had passed away. And a spectacle of quite singular beauty it was, with its long branching cloudy spires of sweet-scented blossom that reminded one of *Veronica Hulkeana*. But now we were to leave the mountains altogether; unattainable as they seemed, thus to turn away from them seemed to italicise the tragedy, especially as our way led up out of the river-bed to the right, immediately on to rolling downs of typical Chinese country, bare and cultivated and uninteresting. I abandoned myself to the brief rare luxury of complete despair as we wound up those dull folds of those dull brown hills, and left behind us out of sight the splendours of the alps and the ancient forests of the Satanee Hor.

In the highest lap of this valley, from which rises steeply the high russet-coloured range which intervenes between the chains of the Min S'an and the Satanee

Alps (itself the watershed of the Satanee Hor and the Blackwater), nestles amid willows and poplars the purely Chinese village of Ga-Hoba. Here, then, we were once more under the shadow of the Celestial Empire, in the protection and responsibility of the Governor of Siku; and here, accordingly, we met at once with the open friendliness and cordiality of a Chinese village. This gave us our first drop of balm, and the second was the discovery of a charming inn, clean and new, with a tiny storied court of woodwork, presided over by a charming Mar-Mar Tanguei, a comely, neat, and smiling rose-cheeked person with an idiot husband, and her hair done up behind in an upstanding duck's-bill horn, over which is cast a blue linen wimple, giving the peaked effect of the coiffures at the Court of Queen Philippa. Mar-Mar received us with the utmost amiability, and we settled in contentedly to the upstairs rooms, and proceeded to review the gloomy situation, while the servants got out the rugs and bedding and spread them over the shingled roofs to dry. Mar-Mar was all that was amiable, sympathised deeply with our late troubles, and begged us to gave no further fears. Purdom courted her with smiles and reels of cotton and almanac pictures, and the fame of our presence went far and wide through the village. Only one discordant note was heard. For, suddenly, beneath our windows were heard insane screams of rage and volleys of devastating curses. Looking out, we beheld an ancient Sidonia dancing up and down with fury because our blankets had apparently trespassed on her roof. No power could soothe her, nor did our boys make much effort to do so, though the offending blankets were duly withdrawn. Mar-Mar ran up and down unhappily, declaring that the lady (by now almost in a black apoplexy of passion) was a



BACK IN CHINA; LAY-GÔ THE DONKEYMAN AND HIS FAMILY

friend of hers, and what was to be done? When this storm had passed away into side-alleys, still volleying crackled thunders, the heavens took up the tale and also thundered and lightened heavily. Undeterred by these omens, we spent the evening taking counsel with Mar-Mar as to what we might next proceed to do, and then were retired for the night, when we were interrupted by the penitence of the ancient scold, so overcome with reports of our magnificence that nothing would serve her but to beg pardon on her knees. Accordingly I sat up in bed as majestically as I could manage, and the doors being opened, most of the village was revealed standing in a crowded semicircle behind the offender, who now beat her forehead on the floor and in a thin lamentable wail deplored her iniquities; finally to be pardoned and depart radiant clutching a present of 50 cash, or about 2½d.

And even as thunderstorms give way to shine, so did now our gloom pass away in the promise of unexpected prosperity through Mar-Mar's revelations. For it appeared that while the lower Chagolese reaches of the Satanee Hor were unnegotiable and Tibetan, there existed, just across the fell, and immediately opposite all those alpine peaks from which we had so lately turned away, a small village of friendly Tibetans occupying a last outpost of China, and noted for their loyalty. Here we should still be under Chinese protection, accordingly, and here we should have the mountains far more ready to our hand than we had ever dared to believe possible. It remained only to send our cards over to the Mandarin of Siku, announcing our intention and securing his sanction. Thus our clouds rolled away simultaneously with the storm, and we sallied forth in a golden afternoon to con the neighbourhood.

All this country is divided up inextricably between various local Princes and the Chinese Empire. Ga-Hoba lies, I say, immediately at the foot of a red-earthed range that attains some nine thousand feet. It commands the track over to Siku, which here crosses the pass. But immediately overhanging Ga-Hoba itself there clings along the forested side of the hill a little monastery and hamlet and sacred woodland climbing the steep of the slope, that own the jurisdiction of the far-off Prince of Tan Shang, who also is overlord of the much larger village and prosperous big abbey of Wu-Ping, about two miles east of Ga-Hoba, at the foot of the same range, and clearly visible from the Chinese village. While away across the river rises the height of Chagola in the dominion of the remote Jo-ni Prince, and only a few miles westward along that same river the alpine country is held once more by the Chinese Empire, before it passes on into the vague and terrible sway of the black Tepo tribes. Thus all forces pull against all the others, but in times of peace there is no fear for Chinese authority at Ga-Hoba and Satanee, hard-pressed as this last little poor place is between the Chagolese immediately to the east and the raiding Tepos so close at hand on the west. In times of storm, however, the public opinion of Wu-Ping and Chago and the local monasteries is very well able to make its pressure felt even in Ga-Hoba, while humble little Satanee, between the eastern and the western millstones, is perfectly helpless at all times, as China is not greatly concerned with so insignificant a place beyond exacting its excessive tribute.

This is a curious strip of country. Wu-Ping and Ga-Hoba lie in a sort of shallow trough stretching along the foot of the Red Range, while in front they are sheltered

by another but much lower trench-ledge immediately hedging in the deep bed of the Satanee Hor beneath. This trough and its rolling downs are of the same rich red loam as most of the high ridge behind. Here and there the steeper slopes are clothed in a scant short scrub, and here and there on the lower crest are preserved woodlands and plantation-like patches of pine along its skyline; all the rest is cultivated to the last inch in rolling stretches of tillage. First there is one little wood of very ancient and magnificent firs about half a mile from the village, the property of a monastery, and therefore religiously preserved; the crowded verdure of its floor is filled with the Wood-nymph Primula and the dusky Disporon's hanging bells of snow. Higher up, where the stately columns of the firs rise so thick that light hardly penetrates their gloom, a Veitchian Peony occurs amid an undergrowth of honeysuckles, together with a strange herb-Paris like our own, but larger and with so many long narrow rays to the green star that it seems more like a wild sea anemone, till in autumn it erupts in bunches of coral-scarlet fruit more gorgeous than ever in *Iris fœtidissima*. Emerging from this wood, you pass a little cosy monastery tucked undiscoverably into a bay of the hill, and find yourself on a moorland down of shrubby Potentillas and such-like leading up to the final ridge, and dimpled with myriads of tiny bummocks, round the turfy slopes of which glows everywhere the rose-pink heads of a dear little Primula,* so close akin to our own bird-e'en that you need go no farther than *P. farinosa* for its picture,

* *P. Loczii, Kanitz,* as I firmly believe; the original record and diagnosis of *P. Loczii* from Kansu being in no way necessarily invalidated by Kjellman's subsequent erroneous inclusion under this name of another species from far-off Alaska.

though this pretty thing has no meal, is perhaps a trifle shorter in the stems and larger in the flowers, and has the very curious habit of running about with bright green fleshy runners till it often forms into an intricate mat, each rosette sending out half a dozen runners or more, with the effect of some questing vegetable octopus.

The final ridge is crowned and crested with the noblest wood of *Pinus Armandii* that I have ever seen. This very sumptuous pine, with its rich volume of rich green, is essentially a plant, not of the alpine districts (into which it hardly penetrates), but of the lower foothills approaching to the big ranges. It occurs all over the rather drier hillsides amid rough scrub throughout South Kansu, always scattered, rarely if ever in so dense and well-developed a forest mass as here on the last ridge of the down that confronts the full glory of the Satanee Alps. It may be that the coolness and moisture of this semi-alpine elevation and aspect may here specially appeal to it, or it may merely be that this wood is sacred, and so has escaped the peasant's knife, which elsewhere makes such merciless havoc of *P. Armandii*, alike for fuel and for the delicious seeds, fat and wholesome and delicious as those of *P. Pinea*, which lurk in early winter between the scales of its enormous pendent cones of emerald green. Anyhow, if you want to see *P. Armandii* at the highest pitch of its possibilities, ancient, voluminous, opulent, and splendid, you have only to make your way to that high, cool arête between Ga-Hoba and the deep-sunk bed of the Satanee Hor, where the pine-wood rises from a surfy scrub of barberries and rose and venomous heavy-scented Daphne in burdened bushes of waxy mauve blossom.

I can promise you another notable sight there also. For, as you come out upon the crest, the promise of the

peering mountains is at last fulfilled, and your breath is taken away by the sudden apparition of the Satanee chain in all its appalling splendour, from its towering crowns of ice to its roots of forest far below in the narrow bed of the Satanee River. And the most magnificent of its peaks stands immediately opposite. Sweep over sweep of forest, microscopic as dark fur and torn by naked ravines of ruin, lead the eye upwards to the great precipices, the violent soaring wonder of the Felsenhorn, culminating far overhead in the trident of its triple peak. I know of no mountain that so immediately and completely confronts you with the entire majesty of its presence, displayed in haughty ostentation from crown to base. The Wetterhorn takes the stage well from the Scheidegg, and the Jungfrau turns a stately shoulder upon Murren; Marmolata poses to the Bindelweg, and the Cimon della Pala insults over the Malga Rolle. But none of these points of view give you quite that dominating perch straight in front of the whole magnificence of a mountain. Or perhaps it is that the lines and adjuncts of the Felsenhorn are here more unsurpassed in general perfection; its lower vesture of forest, its impression of gigantic majesty, the noble and soaring lines of its architecture, the sweep of its descent towards the river, make up a picture more altogether overwhelming than the stark-naked terrors of the impending Cimon; the lumping, graceless, snowy mass of the Marmolata (which in point of fact contemptuously turns a fat and graceless back to the velvet-clad Austrian tourists on the Bindelweg); the chromolithographic austerities of the Jungfrau and the Wetterhorn, dominating chiefly by force of their size. Here, anyhow, you are poised on an ideal *Aussichtspunkt* at some eight thousand feet, and immediately opposite across the

beck there postures for you in all her manifold magnificences a mountain which is a compendium of all mountain beauties, from the sweeping skirts of forest down her slim flanks and round her feet to the gaunt splendour of her triform summit, shooting upwards to some fourteen thousand feet in one tremendous leap from the abysms of the river, itself already some six thousand feet above sea-level.

The whole chain lies before you, but immediately to the right of the Felsenhorn it seems to break and fall back, leaving the peaks standing forward in solitary eminence. In the far background, though, height rises over height to altitudes probably surpassing that of the Felsenhorn, but in comparatively long and undistinguished lines suggesting enormous rolling uplands, between which intervene, no doubt, ghylls and dark ravines of tremendous depth, isolating each upland snowfield from what seems from here to be a contiguous piece of it. But this vast bay, guarded by the Felsenhorn on one side, has similar guardians on the other, where the range sweeps forward again in a gigantic wall of naked castellated dolomite, stretching away westward, citadel behind citadel and tower behind tower, till their details are lost in the distant chaos of Tibet. At its angle, almost opposite Satanee, the chain stands forward to match the Felsenhorn in a huge compilation of precipices and towering summits that suggests some superhuman architect; height over height they loom, and the Bastion that we shall see dominating Satanee with so important an air of being the last word in mountains is seen from here to be the merest insignificant pedestal to the masses of Castleberg behind it, and the vast agglomeration of splendours behind Castleberg, now stretching away westward, continuing the line of the range, which on the eastern side of the Fel-

senhorn runs away in a high line of peaks and forests comparatively low and dull, which the once-magnificent Chagoling breaks at last with its insignificant hummock of rock, standing up above the ridge in the last effort of the chain which from that point subsides so abruptly into the dulness of the Chinese downs.

The whole wall of the chain is one sombre velvet of primeval woodland, above which the nudities of the dolomite go soaring. From your feet, as you stand on that ridge, a similar steep slope sinks sharply away downwards towards the distant brawlings of the beck; but the slopes that confront the big range are evidently not quite so cool and damp as those that flow from it, and you look down on more open land, more cultivated, clothed in much less important and ancient forest, unless where some monastic grove hints that the present state of things speaks only for the ravages of culture, and does not really imply so startling a divergence between the climate and rainfall on one side of the valley and those on the other. At the same time it is notable that, just as Western China yields astonishingly swift transitions from a desert flora to an alpine, from the torrid tropics of the Blackwater to the flowery fields on Thundercrown, even so throughout the region the contrasts are certainly much more sharp than any to be usually observed in our own alps. The difference between the vegetation of northern and of southern slopes is particularly marked, and though it does not attain its full stringency till you reach the foothills of the Min San in the Jo-ni region, even here it is quite evident that the cold sweep of the big chain to the depths of the Satanee Hor is markedly different in climate from that of the warmer, drier slopes that meet it facing south, and the open rolling downs behind, undulating up towards the barrier of the Red Range.

CHAPTER IX

SATANEE*

We filled a few quiet and delightful days in Ga-Hoba with exploring the folds of the Red Range and the deep ghyll behind the village itself from which a beck emerges, but cannot be pursued for long, as it soon becomes a torrent wholly filling its channel, with overhanging cliffs hardly an arm's width apart rising up and up converging for hundreds of feet overhead till the depths of the cañon are dark as those of the Aarenschlucht or the Gorge de Trient. Mafu meanwhile had ridden over the hills to Siku, and ere long returned with permission (a rather unenthusiastic permission, had we stopped to consider) from the Mandarin to establish ourselves at Satanee, together with an escort of four soldiers to help us do so and protect our stay. The Governors of Siku perhaps hailed the possibilities of a peaceful sojourn for us in that remote spot, as preferable to the risks we should be running elsewhere. For Mafu brought us back our first news of the invasion of Kansu.† At present it was all dim and terrific, but we learned that all the country behind us was on fire, and Siku itself might be the next point of attack. For now the second

* I spell it so to try at conveying the sharp long stress on the final syllable, which could not be got by "Satani."

† Siku means Western Strength, but here for once I should feel it an unnecessary freedom to translate a name I know so well.

stream of Wolves was pouring up from the south through those gorges of the Blackwater. Biku and pleasant little Wen Hsien were already a desolation of charred and bloody ruins; Kiai-jô was rejoicing in revelry of rebellion with the Wolves. No wonder the Mandarins sat doubtfully upon their seats, and hailed with relief the prospect of our removal from Ga-Hoba, directly on a main line to Siku, to the safer fastness of Satanee. They did not quite yet forecast the effect that this outburst of triumphant anarchy would have on the Tibetan tribes all up the March.

After a day of reconnoitring, then, from which Purdom returned in a state of complete enthusiasm about Satanee, its situation, beauties, possibilities, and the friendliness of its inhabitants, we began appointing our removal, and on the day following set off over the rolling ruddy laps of the fields, with the train of carriers in a long procession ahead. The morning was of a stifling stuffiness under a grey level sky; when we reached the crest of the Pinewood Pass all the big mountains stood visible indeed, but leaden against a leaden background. Far and far you now descend towards the Satanee River, down long slants and slopes of rough scant coppice, a tangle of rose and little barberry and brambles and briars innumerable. Rounding a huge bay of the fell, the track coils cleverly. Overhead nestles high on the mountain-side a small Tibetan hamlet that is for all the world like some shingled amassment of chalets that you might see clinging to the steeps of the European Alps; but the path leaves it aloft on the right, and winds down, down, down, through hedgerows and jungles of vegetation now perceptibly more opulent, until at long last you find yourself in the level of the brawling ice-coloured Satanee Hor, tempestuous in its bouldered bed.

After this the way continues up the course of the river, along the shrubby lane, or threading the dense coppice of Variable Buddleia that fills the shingle-flats of the reclaimed or dwindled stream, and affords such famous harbourage for leopards. And then, turning a corner past a chorten, you find yourself in a wide amphitheatre of cultivated laps sloping up to the roots of the green towering ridge above, whence a steep wall of primeval forest immediately impends over the straggling line of chalets that is Satanee, with its monastery just beyond at the farther side.

Up the deliberate and muddy ascent we toiled, traversed the perilous glissades of slime by which the path climbs into the village, and then successfully threaded the ankle-deep ancestral mud of the main street itself, until we came to the cloister that had been appointed us for a lodging. The Miao of Satanee is but a poor and meagre place, long neglected, and now on the last edge of decay. For Tibetan piety prefers completely new buildings to timely restorations; there is much less feeling of merit or possibility of profit about patching an old shrine than about putting up a brand-new one. So the Miao of Satanee totters piteously towards its end. The little walled yard of the forecourts is a tangle of grass and green weeds, and the church that fronts upon it, with its two collapsing towers and its veranda of gaping planks, is almost a ruin already; while the Kings of the Four Quarters, keeping guard against evil in the porch, stand ghastlily flaking and scabbing away, revealing the naked clay of their fabric. Pick your way over the abysses of the planking, and pass in through the big doors of the church. You meet a cold darkness, a dustiness of ancient decay. All round in the twilight hang curtain-like grim scrolls of Buddhas

THE MIAO OF SATANEE. BEAN-RACKS IN THE FOREGROUND

and Bodhisattvas, and monstrous congresses, and hells as crude as any Christian's conception. The scarlet pillars that uphold the fabric are now slanting, the whole building reels drunkenly and as if it might collapse at any moment; the upper story is manifestly unsafe already, and the gallery from tower to tower is impassable. The hall of the church is a grimy void of gloom. Littered on the floor lay mumming-masks more finished and of finer work than any I saw elsewhere, but the altar-throne was vacant of its Buddha, and no hand for generations seemed to have disturbed the dense layer of neglect that covered the stacks of sacred volumes in the corner; only here and there, beneath some scroll, a line of brass tartlet-pans, neatly burnished and full of holy-water, indicated that any life still continued in the shrine. Locked in its loneliness the church stood empty all the day; it was only towards evening, we found, that down came Abbot Squinteyes from his cosy lattiçed cottage at the other end of his village to do the Office. His acolyte would unbar the solemn doors and boom joyously upon a drum in summons to a congregation that never came. So in a few minutes the bolts were shot again, and, the service over, the Pontiff once more at leisure to come up and pester the stranger with curiosity and protests of affection.

A desolate life was that of the Miao of Satanee; even the abbot and his one or two underlings had betaken themselves to more comfortable lodgings outside, and left to decay the three or four rooms that occupied one corner of the yard. On the other ranged a more important structure, with a large cooking hall for the basement, and above a verandaed story of woodwork, making a set of three guest-chambers, long untenanted, indeed, but in far better repair and of more solid work

than many of the monastic buildings. It was here that we were accommodated, and it did not take us much time to unfold rejoicing in such a comfortable haven. The villagers streamed up in crowds to watch our installation, our adjustments of planks strung up on strings for shelves, our pictures, our beds, and all the multifarious complications that must have seemed like Capuan luxury to those bone-poor villagers, to whom bare food and fire is all they dare to ask of life. For Satanee is a struggling little honest place, perpetually under the weather. It depends for its living on those slopes of beans and potatoes that fill the wide bay beneath the village, falling away to the beck. Even when the harvest is good, the Chinese Mandarin at Siku takes a heavy toll; and even when the Satanese have got fairly cheaply out of his claws, they are liable at any moment to be raided by the Chagōlese from the east or the Tepos from the west, against either of whom China is quite powerless to help them, and not by any means concerned to do so.

In a bad year, that is, they merely starve, while in a good one they only starve the more in the excessive tolls taken of them, first by Siku, and then by the Tepos. But they continue a cheery, jolly folk of the kindliest temper, delighting in foreigners and friendlinesses. It was here, in fact, that Beresowsky spent a winter bird-hunting in the huge forests of the Alps just opposite, and his memory is still cherished by the people; only once is it on record that a harsher mood possessed them. It was when some old lady of the place—an "old lady," mark you, no mere woman, though one hardly imagined that such nice distinctions could have ruled in Satanee, where everyone seems on a perfect equality of jovial and primeval grime—when an

" old lady " went carelessly to sleep over her pipe one evening on the Kang, with the result that the whole village was swept from end to end by fire, and of all those lines of low and shingled wooden chalets not one was left. Then, indeed, in the bitterness of their calamity the good people of Satanee could hold themselves no longer, but rose up and slew that old lady, regardless of her ladyhood.

For many hours we held a reception in our three rooms and on the veranda. The villagers crowded round, and the headman made introductions and showed us off. He was a splendid person; of large-boned Tibetan handsomeness, with teeth that would have made a dentist's despair, perpetually flashing in smiles; brilliant brown eyes, and a big, finely moulded face, with silver ring swinging from one ear its boss of turquoise and coral. He wore loose sackcloth trousers, ankle-bands, roughest sandals of hide; in the belt of his sackcloth blouse there stuck his pipe and dirk. He was only about thirty-five, and there was yet another headman over him, who did not, however, loom so prominent, though quite as hospitable. It was strange to feel in this wild place that in these two ragged and grimy peasants we had the first links of a straight and direct chain of responsibility for our comfort and prosperity, reaching up unbroken from the Shang-yu of Satanee to the Emperor of China. But yet other potentates mingled in our reception, for now behold Abbot Squinteyes panting up into the scene, with his splendid young underling behind him.

A plain and portly person is Abbot Squinteyes, swathed in volumes of dim purple beneath which paddle the naked dark leather of his feet, for he has put off at the foot of the wooden stairs his great wellingtons of

scarlet that so recall the buskins of a Roman Emperor. He overflows with vinous urbanity and excessive affection, and his vociferous admiration of our possessions is so sincere that when he has at last departed several of these are found to have disappeared also, no doubt magnetically attracted into the profundities of his purple petticoat. But he, too, is a representative, and sheds lustre on the assemblage; he stands for all the spiritual weight of the Mahayâna Church.

So our days passed in Satanee between the highest eminences of the material and the spiritual worlds; between Cæsar and Pope we had a crowded time, and it was rarely that one or other was not hovering about the veranda or the yard. Quite different was the one permanent inhabitant of this last, the one human being who shared the shelter of our little walled enclosure. For this was a very aged monk, a passing guest of the foundation, who had his room in a corner of that row of buildings which confronted ours across the court. The old monk was a simple, saintly, kindly person who never intruded, and when invited up for a visit showed a beautiful and dignified courtesy. As soon as the call was paid he would go down into the yard again and resume his rosary, sitting in a warm and sunny corner. All day he was busy with murmured or chanted invocations of the Holy One, or else he would take a boarded volume of the Scriptures and sit diligently over it in the sunshine, with a thick projecting fringe of red horsehair bound round his bald forehead to keep off the glare. He never gossiped or babbled or boozed like the abbot; all his days were filled with an unostentatious holiness that might well put to shame the squawking propagandist in his crudity. Perhaps he did not know much, perhaps he was credulous and unlearned in criticism

and controversies, perhaps he only knew enough to be happy. But in these is the kingdom of heaven.

A blessed place is Satanee. The village of grey chalets and giant naked corn-racks straggles along beneath a wall of forest which is the sacred and inviolable woodland of the shrine, from which at intervals, up and up the steep surf of the oaks, tower circles of titanic aged spruces, sacred groves of an immemorial cult, with often in their midst an untidy stack of long poles and splinters and lances, bound together and waving white invocation flags from their points. Below the village sweeps a wide swelling bay of downs, cultivated in laps of corn and bean and potato, descending at last to the noble arcaded wooden bridge that there spans the Satanee Hor. But up behind the village there are only wild hills and woods, soaring away in ridge over ridge of copse and lawn towards the high crest of the Red Range, where all the cool chines and folds are filled with a dense forest of red birch and fir and rhododendron, an alpine seclusion of ancient peace, though not competing in stateliness of stature with the Sacred Wood, on either side of which descend steep ravines from the ridge, each convoying cascades that perpetually grind corn and aspirations with equal assiduity, since here, in their painted wooden shrines, sit invocation-wheels in the water, unceasing in their revolutions of the Blessed Name. In the spring the Sacred Wood is a dappled mysterious haunt of darkness. Here and there in the grassy open glades about half-way up sprout colonies of ample-foliaged orchids, some Phaius with loose tall spikes of greenery-yallery bumblebees with bodies of crumpled umber velvet. A little higher, and you come into a clearing ringed in with Pyrus in bending clouds of pearly snow; and here the Wood-nymph Primula

comes once more into possession, as in all woodlands of this region at these altitudes. Among this wave the fluffy creamy spikes of a Smilacina that exactly recalls on a much larger scale the fluffy, creamy little plumes of the May-lily in our own alpine woods, but that here the bending feathery foam of the flowers is deliciously scented of hyacinth.

Ere long you pass upwards into the secular gloom of the spruce forest, where no such riot of life can any longer occupy the dark. Here a new Smilacina occurs, squinny and miserable and plain, with green stars; and here, very rarely from the deep banks of deadness, spring the exotic waxen faces of Calypso, succulent and crystalline and sweet, in faint morbid tones of white and rose and fading lilac. Now, along a level piece, the spur leads you clear of the forest towards the main ridge, up which you clamber hand over hand by steep green slopes of still cultivated land (though often left fallow to become a sea of strawberry stars and the little azure Gentian); then you attain the alpine zone, and come to outcrops of dark precipice, where the clearance of the ancient woodlands has left the lingering Dryad Primula so comparatively poor that I will only introduce you to her in her happier form and proper development in the moist bamboo brakes of the Bastion Gorge. Peonies begin here, too, rose-scented and of soft rose colour; there is brushwood and alpine herbage, and ahead of you the surging haze of the upland woods, filling the gullies and chines with a mist of lavender, and standing out like a dense smoke along the highest ridge. Up and up we go, through tangled jungles of the small bamboo, which would give you less pleasant news of itself if you tried to traverse it after a shower; and then away down to the right into the depths of the glen, where all the steeps

of the red auriferous earth are dotted, amid the hazy copse, with the more solid splendours of the most beautiful Rhododendron that ever my travels have yet showed me.

In a tidy, tall, steep-domed bush it grows, or in a no less tidy, well-furnished tree of some fourteen feet with comely rounded head; its foliage is ample, brilliant, and glossy, drooping away at each spray's end in oval emerald blades from the large and lovely clusters of blossom with which each is crowned. Loosely borne are the flowers, not too many of them to the branch for the full beauty of each to be displayed; it will never, therefore, earn the applause of such fanciers as have made it the rule for show Rhododendrons to wear their flowers in a dense fat cone like a giant artichoke. More gracious is this, and more justly proud of her waved great open trumpets of the very softest pearl-pink, with warmer notes outside, that suggest in shape and colour precisely those of *Rh. Aucklandii*, though not quite on so impressive a scale of size.

I note it not only as one of the loveliest of its kin I know, but also as the only Rhododendron of 1914 that was not rigidly calcareous in its requirements. While all the others, growing in peaty compost, are invariably plants demanding limestone rock and subsoil, this beauty alone flourished in a very rich red loam that seems to have no affinities whatever with the limestone. Here, and here only, too, I met it, though probably it ranges along all the gullies of the highest woodland along the Red Range between Siku and Satanee. It has another point to remark: its extraordinary freedom of flower. Every shoot ended in its graceful bundle of apple-blossom coloured bloom, and that this was not the mere accident of a happy season I learned when I

returned there in early winter for its seed, and found all the young shoots of the season armed unanimously with the fat buds of next year's show no less profuse than that of the last.

Down in the rocky beck-bed in the depths of the glen, and even in the very ripples themselves, grows another precious plant, though much less beautiful than the Rhododendron. This is a giant ragwort, peculiar to the alpine stony rills of this region. It unfolds leaves as gigantic, almost, as those of the giant coltsfoot of Japan, of a sombre and iridescent green, deployed each on a stolid stout stalk that is clothed in the most sumptuous vesture of crimson-maroon plush. Above these rounded, immense leaves shoots up, to the height of six feet and more, the stately stem clothed in the same plush. Only near the summit does this divide into five or six branches that all ascend together, erect, each hanging out an innumerable multitude of tiny yellow tassels, depending in so many further crowded tassels up the stem. The flowers, then, are not notable or lovely; the charm of the plant lies in its superb port, its dark-green splendid umbrellas of leafage, so neatly contrasting with the crimson fur of their stems, and in the flocculent clouds of silver that crown the stems when every tiny dowdy tassel has become a little silver star pressed together in a haze of fluffy whiteness up the ascending branches. There is a very inferior cousin of this noble thing, indeed, quite common in the open alpine marshes of the Tibetan valleys opposite Jo-ni; but this is smaller, quite ordinary-looking, lacking not only the stature of the first, but also that vesture of crimson fur which is its supreme note of attraction, in contrast to the dark leaves. For these, in the Jo-ni plant, are of an every-day plebeian bright greenness.

Beautiful sequestered glades are these deep-wooded hollows and rills in the folds of the Red Range up behind Satanee. But their utmost glory fades by comparison with the view on which that fortunate village immediately faces. For high overhead on your left you have the whole enormous majesty of the Felsenhorn sweeping proudly up from the dark forests in which the uncultivated slopes beyond the beck are vested. Then comes the deep break in the range, where a path leads up the wooded valley of Da Hai Go, winding among the tumbled coppiced hills that occupy the whole basin, until far in the background the main range resumes its sway in wall over wall of dark forest crowned with down over down of undulating snowfields. Deep, deep in the heart of these run profound and gloomy gorges buried in the woodland, one of them cutting its course away to the left behind the Felsenhorn, and another equally sharp to the right behind the naked dolomitic castles of Castleberg and the Croda da Lama. For now the range sweeps forward again on the right, and over Satanee across the river impends what looks like the overwhelming height of the Bastion, a mass of precipices and snows and undulating summit, which is in reality but the merest footstool to the gaunt towers of the Castleberg group, only to be first realised from the slopes below the Sacred Wood, but from there making a picture of memorable magnificence, ranging in rank behind rank of giant fortresses away into the westward distance of Tibet.

The hills and valleys that fill the broad break in the mountains immediately opposite Satanee are really of considerable size and huge extent, though under the colossal walls of forest that encompass them on three sides, leading up to the yet more tremendous citadels

of bare precipice overhead, they seem as nothing to the untrained eye, like so many little molehills that one ought to ransack in a few hours. It was here that I had my first lesson, then, in the paralysing scale on which the Tibetan Alps are built. There is nothing to give one any standard of comparison; they look like so many Alps of Europe, yet they are constructed on a scale of such baffling enormousness that the mind can never wholly succeed in grasping it, and is for ever being deceived by some ten minutes' slope that takes a solid hour to ascend. Various happy days we spent in these smiling fells, amid their woods and copses; the weather was of a girlish fitfulness, and often rain or sleet was the termination to what had opened as a cloudless morning. None the less, the spring was unfolding in lavish loveliness hour by hour, and, pending the passing of the snows and the possibility of moving up into camp on the heights, we found ample occupation in the budding hills of the Da Hai Go Valley and the forested glens that ran up all sides into the flanks of the Felsenhorn and the Bastion.

To attain that happy land you descend the long slopes of corn below Satanee, where the pheasants whirr and clatter in the corn, to the big wooden bridge that spans the ice-blue torrent. On the far side you mount a first barrier of hill, over cultivated ground and between lush hedgerows of Spiræa, rose, and Ribes, until you come to a knot of tall old sacred spruces that crown the little pass. From this point you see into the rolling basin of the Da Hai Go Valley, with its copsy slopes and large laps of tillage and the sheets of pale gold that are the wild mustard which here and there springs up *en masse* where the forest has been burned or cleared. The path winds in and out, climbing slowly along the

flanks of the wooded hill, with more and more superb prospects of forest on the slopes opposite, across the bed of the beck, that descend in desperate sweeps from the feet of the Felsenhorn. Here we are still too low for the firs and pines that make a uniform wall of darkness overhead, but the high glens and steeps are the favoured ground *par excellence* of the red birch, which here attains the highest pitch of its magnificence. As you wander along through a light woodland of poplar and oak and such small fry, with rare Staphyleas standing up from the ruck and swinging out their countless bunches of rose-pink blooms, your eye is more and more held captive by the increasing splendour of that woodland wall opposite, and of the deep great ghylls that you begin to see by degrees sweeping up towards the flank of the Bastion and the high base of the Castleberg mass. In mid-May spring has hardly yet spoken her word to those upper woods, and the valleys are an undulating drift of pale violet smoke with the rounded multitudes of the red birch, which, beneath the limit of the pines, composes almost the whole forest at its higher elevations. But down below, across the clear little blue-green beck that babbles so far beneath in its bed, the world is more wakeful; the vast wall of the woodland is a kaleidoscope of softest and entrancing loveliness.

The dominant note is the red birch, a delicate fog of blue lilac with glints of rose, and an occasional early burst of vividest pale green; amid these runs an undertone of poplars and little oaks, now breaking in a quiver of richest deep crimson. Tall firs occasionally strike a note of darkness, and the rest of the picture is filled with misty greens and pale yellows. There is no tearing yourself away; at each turn of the path you are caught by the blended beauties of that steep amassed cloud of

lavender, crimson, emerald, and sunlit golden tones, rolling upward and upward overhead till at last it is stopped by the sombre wall of firs that descends from the Felsenhorn, now peering over from above in its impregnable splendour of precipice and icy peaks. View succeeds view, until at last you command from the highest point of the track the complete prospect of the Da Hai Go Basin, with its ups and downs and manifold convolutions, away to the huge barrier of black forest across the far end, above which are seen deployed the snowfields, which, perhaps, without conspicuous elevations though they look, may be the highest levels of the range, and attain the Russian estimate of eighteen thousand feet. But nothing surpasses the first glimpse you get of the forest wall as soon as you have reached that knot of sacred firs on the crest of the first climb up from the Satanee River; and here, beneath their solemn shade, you may profitably lie for long in contemplation of that banked-up vapour of colour, and in gratitude offer your subscription in the form of a little white pebble laid on the sacred pile that blesses the climbing path just at its turning away from the Holy Grove.

The days passed in delightful preparatory explorations of the glens in the Da Hai Go Basin, almost always concluding in fierce rain, as the spring fashion is in these Alps. Everybody matured in friendliness, and no further ill-news came, except a more elaborate tale from Ga-Hoba of the fall of Sian and the red wreckage that had there been perpetrated; and the Mahomedans of Soaring Phœnix, called in to help the capital against the Wolves, ultimately helping nobody but themselves, and that to everybody else's belongings, with the result that massacre had provoked massacre all round, and the

whole of Shensi appeared a sea of slaughter, Mahomedans killing Chinese wholesale, and Chinese retaliating on all the Mahomedan villages in their reach, and the Wolves ravening hither and thither in the chaos. Nothing was reported of any troubles nearer at hand, and no cloud overlay the friendliness of Abbot Squinteyes or his two superb and Roman-looking coadjutors, statuesque in their long purple folds and in the firm outlines of their massive faces. So the day came when at last we thought the upper woodlands might be so far awake as to make it profitable to begin exploring the largest of the four or five deep ravines that tore their way down through the forest from the riven cliffs of the Bastion towards the Satanee Hor.

Far and high were those ghylls; one had not yet begun to have any notion how far and high and large are expeditions in these Alps that look so near and insignificant and small. Accordingly, we did not make the early start we should, and it was not till alter lunch that we set off, attended by the various retainers necessary to carry the various properties which dignity forbids one to carry for oneself in China—a cheap but most delightful refinement of luxury which will for ever spoil one for the European ranges, where one has to be the mule of all one's own burdens oneself, on pain of paying the exorbitant rates of an alpine porter. We descended to the river, crossed it, and ascended along the coppiced shoulder above, along to the right. Alas! we had made an error, and our track at last went lost in a cornfield on the edge of an unnegotiable wild brake of scrub and thorns and bamboo, with a deep ghyll below us, and no way of getting to it but by scrambling down through the bamboos and wasting all our previous climb. Down, accordingly, we slithered and tore and wrenched our-

selves. At the bottom we found the broad and shingled bed of the beck just where it has succeeded in extricating itself from the last deep gorge of the hills for a little, final free meander over open ground before it joins the Satanee Hor a few hundred yards out in the valley. Here, on the moist and mossy walls of the cliff, met us at the outset one of the rosiest sights of the day. For all the cool crevices were ablush with the Rock-nymph Primula in such beauty and amplitude as was never seen before or since. For though we shall find it ubiquitous on the high and open rocks of Thundercrown, I suspect that we have only touched this Primula at its farthest easterly extension. For on Thundercrown, as on Chagoling, it appears starveling and in exile; its magnificence in the cold dark gorges of the Bastion makes me believe that it has its main and happiest home yet farther westward in the fastnesses of Tibet. Certainly it is here a most beautiful little thing, which you may best picture as a specially fine head of *P. hirsuta* applied upon a creamy-mealed single rosette of *P. frondosa*. All along the lines of the shady precipice little tuft after little tuft displays its loose bunch of soft pink flowers, and the mossy gloom is enlightened by netted trails of rosy sparks from crack to crack.

The gorge now narrows to a close wild cañon of darkness, with the woodcutters' trail but very faintly marked on the shingle; and occasionally one climbs from boulder to boulder amid the clear cascades. An open glen comes next, and the track wanders amid coppice and along the edges of bamboo brakes, with the purple cuckoo-pint flaring here and there in the twilight of the bushes. Suddenly a note of brighter colour took our eye, and we thought the cuckoo-pint had varied. No; often as the cuckoo-pint gets taken for a Primula,

here was a Primula on the verge of being taken for a cuckoo-pint. For there in the deepest midnight of the cane-brake we came on a slope of glowing ruby Polyanthus—a gracious and dainty Primula of soft texture, swinging out a head of pendent saucer-shaped flowers some five inches above the soft green crumpled foliage.* This lovely Dryad is as yet of uncertain place. At present it is tentatively merged in the extremely difficult group of *P. lichiangensis*, which itself may be no more than *P. polyneura*, and which, anyhow, is a type in a tangled and confused cousinhood. A stiff habit characterises them all, and flat starry flowers, carried erect, staring upwards in their wide-rayed bunches. *P. Veitchii*, brazen and shrill and flaunting, is the best known in gardens of the group, disfigured by the virulent magenta of their flowers. On Thundercrown, not so far north over the Red Range, occurs what seems to me very near the typical or conventional *P. lichiangensis* in abundance in the upper region of the bamboos; but Silvia stands out from all her cousins in being of much frailer rootage, and in wearing her flowers, not erect and flat, but half pendulous and in a shallow saucer-shape. Though very much wider and ampler in outline, their whole habit and one-sided swing suggests a head of *P. viscosa;* but here the colour is of a rich rose-pink, much cleaner of magenta than in any other of the Polyneura group, from the types of which the beauty of Silvia is quite distinct, though her habit is the same, and she follows the family tradition in frequenting the shady places of the alpine woods at middle elevations. I make no doubt that it was she I saw just unfolding her foliage in the deep moss of the boulders in the forest gorge half-way down from Chagoling;

* *Primula silvia*, sp. *nova*.

but she does not extend to the hotter and drier region of Thundercrown, and elsewhere I have only seen her lingering starved on the hot black rocks above Satanee, from which her protecting forest has been cut away, with occasional glimpses of her in the higher, cooler banks of coppice on the Red Range above Ga-Hoba. Almost always she hands out a single generous bunch of blossom, but once at least I caught a specimen with a second tier of flowers unfolding, after the common custom in the Polyneura group so well exemplified in *P. Veitchii.**

So we left that glowing garden nodding from the bank-side in the unbroken darkness of the bamboo brake. Higher and higher we laboriously toiled from glen to glen towards the far-off foot of the Bastion cliff, high above the misty wall of the forest high overhead. When we came to a tiny alp, where in a tiny thatched hutch almost flush to the ground a tiny boy was in charge of cows, I began to realise, in the darkening afternoon, the true scope of the expedition we had so lightly undertaken; and wondered whether we should ever succeed in reaching that huge *Schlucht*, so far away above us in the wall of limestone precipices that, when we started, had looked like a little rampart with a little rift, but now seemed to have swollen out like a nightmare without ever getting any nearer. No afternoon's walk is this, but a full day's heavy work, to attain even to the ghylls and cliffs, to say nothing of the culminating tableland of moors above. However, we persevered, though the day was now beginning, as usual, to threaten,

* This beautiful plant, or its twin, appears to have turned up again in one or both of the seed lots sent under F. 197, of which the first batch, seen lingering in flower, had seemed nearer to *P. lichiangensis*. Anyhow, my F. 197 proves so far, perhaps, the best and earliest of all the polyneura groups.

and clouds already rolled low and voluminous over the upper brows of the Bastion. Ere long we entered the skeleton forest of the Red Birch, and our way went wilder and wilder up the white-bouldered bed of the beck, in and out amid the wreckage of fallen old firs or tree-trunks brought down in landslides. It was a fantastic and grim darkness of desolation; the dead and living trees seemed to throw hungry moss-clad branches round about in search of unwary travellers, till in the silence of that weird ancient forest one felt as if one were traversing the Polyp-grove of the Little Mermaid's witch. There were no flowers till at length the Rock-nymph Primula began to reappear, and from that point increased steadily in abundance and magnificence up to the very foot of the cliff.

Grander yet and wilder grew the beck-bed, more and more disastrous, chaotic, and terrible, with its wildernesses of huge limestone boulders and the snow-laden slides on each side that had brought so many stately trees atumble in ruin, to add to the whitened wide ruins of the torrent. Gaunter and yet gaunter grew the scene as we emerged at last into opener ground close beneath the final precipices of the Bastion, whose battlements were now lost in motionless masses of storm-cloud growing darker every moment. Snow was clear and sharp in the air, the scent of the earliest living moment in the alpine year; and all along the beck-bed and in the cold hollows and on the shady slopes lay still deep snow-beds. Even the banks on which one walked were often of immortal ice, long since preserved beneath a layer of soil on which grew melancholy mosses and Pyrolas.

Sheer overhead the sombre and ominous sky was taken up with the impending wall of the Bastion. Purdom

chose the forward direction, straight up over a steep of snow and Rhododendron scrub to the foot of the precipice, while I proceeded along the stream where it curled from the right, descending in a succession of long cascades that I wanted to explore. The whole scene had been reminding me of the Schlernklamm on a widened and gigantic scale; now it narrowed to a typical *Schlucht* like that which closes the Schlernklamm. The deep ravine is walled closely in between cliffs all aglow with the Rock-nymph Primula's bright-eyed bunches. The gorge gets narrower and narrower as it winds into the shadow of the great main wall behind, that now seems almost to overhang in its stupendous sheer bulk. The tops are lost in cloud; an evil darkness broods over the blackened fastnesses. The stream leaps down in fall after fall over small successive amphitheatres of naked rock; one can circumvent them by working up round to the right and over each lap by a steep narrow belt of thorny barberries that descends from the precipice; but the third little basin is the last. For here you are brought up short by the final frontage of the Bastion; it seems like a crushing weight all round you and far overhead, excluding light and air and hope. From some undiscoverable crannied channel away up in the impregnable smoothness of the cliff the stream takes its first leap earthwards in a long swaying tail of whiteness that fills the caldron with a pale chill breath of cold. There is no going any farther, unless you are either a worm or an eagle; this tiny basin of snow and ice, so deep in the darkness of the imminent precipices, is the end of your journey.

Yet even here in this grisly dell life was triumphant already. Unattainable in the dank moist walls, wavering and floating in the tossing breath of the *Staubbach*,

hovered the diaphanous ghostly bells of *Lloydia alpina*, swinging out on thread-fine stems with more than the exquisite and elfin grace of the Fair Maid of the Falklands, whom her blown glass-pale bubbles of white blossom otherwise so readily recall. This is our first and most characteristic meeting with one of the most fascinating and rigidly saxatile of rock-plants, never to be seen except in the cool sheer faces of alpine cliffs, where her fairy-like, inconspicuous loveliness and her unearthly air of refinement are most fittingly displayed. At first I confused her with her cousin *L. tibetica*, but *L. tibetica* is a coarse galumph of the alpine meadows, and one does not wonder that *L. alpina* has taken to the impregnable precipices to get out of the way of a connection so plebeian. But, frequent though she is in the stark limestones of the Min S'an and the Satanee Alps, it is only much farther north that the Da Tung Range, on lime or granite, will next year show you the Fairy Bell in her fullest abundance and finest form.

In that grey dank caldron of death the ghostly chimes of the Lloydia seemed appropriate, but there was other and more golden life. For tightly tucked into the crannies, as closely that one was reminded of *Daphne petræa* in close, flat, hard mats of solid pink all over the adamantine rosy frontage of the Tombea, clung and glittered a small Daphne-cousin nearly related to my own citron-coloured novelty of April, though not so large in leaf and blossom. In and out along the crevices twined its wiry little sprigs, each crowned with a head of yellow Daphnes; and below and among it, in cushions of silvery packed rosettlings, were plastered wide wads against the cliff of a Kabschia Saxifrage, whose habit was just that of *S. Rocheliana*, but which was now unfolding, on little ruby-glanded stems, solitary white

flowers in the line of *S. Burseriana*, though not quite so splendid. Nameless other promises flapped and fluttered round the walls in the cold breath of the fall, and very happily I scrambled round on the steep, hard snow-banks in anticipation of much good work to be done here when summer should have fully unfolded things.

But at last my harvest was complete; I slithered and floundered down the ledges and bluffs into the next little basin, and here was immediately brought up short by the astonishing loveliness of the big rue buttercup,* barely unfolding its noble blue-grey plumes of fat leafage along the ground, but now in the full glory of its many-rayed blossoms, like *Anemone blanda* or some huge and ox-eyed daisy of the loveliest soft clear china-blue. Where nothing else was living, these celestial marguerites seemed to lie flat upon the dank dark blackness of the dead earth, along the dampest and shadiest of those damp and shady ledges where no other plant showed life, except a strange fluffy-spiked rosy cousin of the lilies, uprising amid arching narrow foliage of darkest green. Revelling in the clammy moistness of that rich black loam I grappled for my harvest of the blue Ox-eye upon the ledges overhead, and then my sight was caught by a new note of purple shining like a dim spark amid the sere tangles of herbage on the bank.

One must never neglect chances in the field. The one thing you don't go after in a day's hunt will surely prove ultimately to be the one thing you ought to have gone after, just as the one gully you don't visit will surely be the one gully that holds the treasure. I girded up my loins and toiled upwards; the rocks were full of the Rock-nymph, and really by this time I did not dare to hope for more delights. With all the more reason,

* *Callianthemum Farreri*, sp. *nova*.

therefore, did my joints give under me when I arrived at the object of my search; and I even tried to give tongue in my triumph to Purdom, microscopic above me at the foot of the precipice, though it was only as a cracked squeak that my voice went up against the song of the waterfall and the towering silence of the mountain. Now, along the Himalayan borders, and up the very far-off southern Marches of Tibet, there lives a strange race of Primulas that are hardly Primulas at all, and now, indeed, by the greatest of living authorities are no longer so considered. They are like nothing else we know, but their suggestion is rather that of small Gloxinias or gigantic Pinguiculas than of anything else. Before the leaves unfold to their full development spring up the sturdy fleshy stems, each one of which unfurls one solitary huge flower of rich purple, with a prognathous profile and a throat of quite ridiculous length. The group is a small one, and no member of it occurs farther north than Yunnan. Accordingly, it was with a jump of joy, as for something quite unhoped for, that I now saw an obviously new species of this paradoxical cousinhood flaring violet at my feet amid the grass—a grotesque rare glory, with the upper "petals" lying flat back on the tube like an angry cat's ears, while its lower ones stood straight forward like an angry child's pout.

Nor is the first step in plant-hunting the only one that costs in emotion, for after the first specimen there are always more and better to be sought. And, indeed, now that my eye was agog for it, I could discern the luminous blue sparks of the Grand Violet Primula* occasionally dotting the dank ledges up and up the shady walls of the cliff, and here and there was able to wriggle

* *P. Viola grandis*, sp. *nova*, the smallest and most northerly of its section.

my way into reach of a specimen or two. I was half-paralysed with excitement, but it seemed almost in derision that those stately blue violets blazed down upon me here and there from ledges wholly unattainable, and seemed to mock me with the golden twinkle of their central pointil of stamens, which adds so much expression to that already elfish countenance; for this opens first of all as a regular, small, flat star of deepest violet velvet, and then swells and expands and retorts and protrudes until it has developed the full pouting eccentricity of its clear purple maturity.

The evening was drawing on darkly, and doom seemed to brood beneath the blackening walls of the Bastion. From high overhead I saw Purdom glissading down the snow-slope, and when he had rejoined me we raced valleywards as quickly as we might. For now the brewing dark began to break in rain, and soon developed into a vivid thunderstorm. We were soaked by the time we reached the Satanee Hor, and there began to ponder how we should best get to Satanee. A cliffy headland stood out to the right between us and the big bridge; to the left the track led onwards to a village, where there would presumably be another. But we did not fancy the long extra tramp all that way down and then all the way back again; so we decided to trust a small level track that seemed to run towards Satanee in the plain of the river, and might perhaps reveal some unsuspected way of getting by at the foot of the cliff when we came to it. Anyhow, it looked as if so marked a track must certainly lead to some such solution; so off we set, and meanwhile the storm had returned, after a lull, with redoubled fury. Long blasts of icy air tore in tempests down the valley, and the high hills loomed flat and dun-coloured against a dun-coloured

PRIMULA VIOLA-GRANDIS, SP. NOVA. THE GRAND VIOLET

dim sky, from which the lances of the rain descended in white sheets.

But that track was a delusion, and at last tailed off abruptly on the very brink of the river, roaring down its ghyll. Grim alternatives faced us—either to return far down the valley to the lower bridge, or to toil up the high and rugged wooded hill overhead in hopes of finding a way round over the shoulder to the upper one. And as we stood, the wind developed into a succession of wild and withering squalls that flogged us with the frozen wire of the rain intolerably, till at last the four of us in desperation joined hands and forded the furious ice-cold river that drove against us like a team of horses as we went waist high in the tugging tempest of the torrent. On the far side there was still no track to speak of, but only a rough series of ledges and scrambles over little cliffs over the water, by which the peasants make a short cut to Satanee instead of following the main path above that climbs round the flank of the hill. It rained and rained with a malignant grand thoroughness; but the main storm, with the furies of its thunder and its hail, was now moving down the valley towards Chagola, leaving Satanee in the enjoyment of a black, steady night of soaking rain. Innocently rejoicing in our day and its beneficent conclusion, we did not guess the inner meanings of fate, or the purposes of the high gods in that storm; but in a glow of triumph arrived at last in the Miao, so wet that further wetness was impossible, and we were thus left careless of such matters as we went, to stay and gather ample boughs of the local barberry from its dense, tall, eight-foot bushes, laden all along the sprays with hanging spikes of wee yellow roses that diffuse the nauseously sweet scent of *Lilium auratum* or the lightning-blue Canadian Flame.

CHAPTER X

EXODUS

THE next day brought us the first hint of approaching trouble. Our Yamun men returned from Siku with charcoal, and Mafu from Ga-Hoba across the hill. And both carried bad news of China beyond our ken. For terror, it seemed, now reigned in Siku, and panic in Ga-Hoba; Wolves had been seen at Mö-Ping, just over the Red Range, and yet more were reported to be coming across Chagola on horses. A complete isolation, evidently, now cut us off from China, and in a place so poor as this, where the problem of commissariat is always hard, it now threatened, in the cutting of all communications, to become desperate—always supposing that we so far succeeded in eluding the attention of the Wolves and the Tepos as to continue needing any commissariat at all. The question of our own feeding was as nothing to that involved in the maintenance of horse, men, and the Yamun escort from Siku.

True it is that the elegant little cook now revealed himself as not only being totally unable to cook, but also wholly determined not to learn. By a great effort of greed I stirred myself one day into teaching him how to scramble eggs, but then my ardour flagged, for there is to me something absolutely nauseating and appetite-destroying in having had to fuss and take thought over the details of one's own eating. In meditating menus

and supervising their achievement all pleasure of food evaporates, and I henceforth flaccidly abandoned myself to an unbroken dietary of scrambled eggs, further embittered by the smiling face with which the cook would come and ask me what I wished to eat. At first, indeed, there was relief in the occasional pheasants that Purdom shot for the pot, but their season was now over, and chickens are precious as children in a Tibetan village, so that our staves of life were cold tea and toast, glorified by a huge wicker-cased tun of honey that had come to us from Siku, the most delicious I have ever tasted, crusted and clotted and dense as toffee, with coagulations of sugar and all manner of wild sweet flavours accumulated by Tibetan bees from the alpine flowers of the March.

The way to Siku, however, now seemed likely to be cut off, if the advance of the Wolves over Chagola was really talking place. The Mandarins of the city, however, were characteristically guarded in their letter of advice. They merely urged us to avoid the Tibetan territories of the two Princes, Yang Tusa of Jo-ni and Ma Tusa of Tan Shang. The advice, had one been fully informed of all the circumstances, should have been enlightening; it meant that in the general convulsion of Western China the Government was openly owning its inability any longer to control the March. And owning, too, its fear that the March would seize this opportunity of making hay on its own account. Meanwhile, the Mandarins of Siku had to choose between two almost equally displeasing alternatives. Either they might summon us, reluctant, into the harbourage of Siku, which, in the imminent invasion of the Wolf, was likely to be at least as dangerous a shelter as the wildest regions of Tibet; or else to leave us to our own devices

among the Tibetans, in the hope that we might escape everybody's notice and have the luck to meet with no local disturbances. Characteristically they chose the smooth and civil line of least obvious trouble, already sufficiently consumed as they were with anxieties about their own lives and their own city, without adding the perilous if glorious responsibility of having the silver-burdened foreigners also under their immediate charge.

We ourselves had no inkling of harm; this remote corner of the world now seemed just the one least likely to be troubled by the general tempest outside. We addressed ourselves to our plans and expeditions, and did not draw any conclusions from our Yamun men's plain desire to be off back to Siku. A few points, indeed, we noticed, but never thought they had any application to ourselves. It was odd, for instance, that we were no longer visited by Abbot Squinteyes or any of his vicars; it was odd, too, that the place seemed to contain more monks than formerly—surreptitious people, who peeped and pried round corners, and were evidently anxious to dissemble their presence instead of satisfying their curiosities on our veranda at all hours of the day. It was merely interesting that such a bustle of religious activity should now be animating the whole village, that in the pelting darkness of the night the air should be full of yells and ululations and the banging of guns and rockets and crackers designed to avert the dreaded hail, we supposed, from the springing corn. And the next day the entire population, headed by Abbot Squinteyes puffing in his purples, went toiling up the wood behind the village, there to pray away perils and disasters in the sacred groves. So, at least, came the tale, and local news amply endorsed these reasons of the Shang-yu's as sufficient. The Wolves,

it was told us, had spread alarm even into the deepest recesses of the March, and in Ga-Hoba such a panic reigned already that the inhabitants had made their bundles ready to flee away into the hills; not a hint of personal application to ourselves did the good breeding and loyalty of the village and its headmen allow to transpire in all this stir. We listened, and were interested and thrilled, but not concerned.

Still the mysterious atmosphere of anxiety persisted, and again the pious procession sought the heights to deprecate the same mysterious cloud of evil. The pressure of the situation was brought home to us when the chief Shang-yu declared that he could not fulfil his promise of taking us up into the shallower gully that descends from the Bastion, as he no longer felt free to go so far from home. None the less, on the third day after the hail-storm, we set out in a morning of level depressing greyness, stuffily hot, yet with a chill wind. Spurred by the evident and growing desirability of establishing ourselves safely for the summer in some high camp up in the wild security of the hills, we explored the Bastion gully, found an admirable place for tents and encampment, and came home in the evening, fired with the prospect, to send Mafu across immediately over the hills to Ga-Hoba for mules to transport our baggage up to the heights on the next day. The evening passed in packing up all our so-recently unfolded goods, and in the manifold pleasures of anticipation. What a summer we should have up there, secure from the troubles of China, in some sequestered cranny of Tibet, with the Alps at our disposal! The old headman appeared to applaud our scheme, and promised to do all that in him lay to provide us with supplies, the problem of which now promised to be less difficult, owing to the alpine

grass on which the ponies would graze up there. But, as he wistfully said, though he would do his best, how can one get blood from a stone? At last, flushed with hopes for the immediate future, we retired to bed in our denuded rooms, longing for the morrow, with its start up to camp.

Some time after midnight we were roused by beating at the gate of the courtyard. It was the Mafu, returned from Ga-Hoba. But why, in black night, and such a night of deluging rain, had he dared the long, difficult, and stony climb over the pass? We were soon to learn. Crouched in a corner of the room, and yellow as a guinea in the flickering light of the candle, he told his tale in husky whispers, to the accompaniment of the splashing rain outside in the grass-grown courtyard below. Siku had fallen, whether to Wolves or other revolutionaries made little matter; the town was a chaos of blood and ruin, the Mandarins had either bought their lives or bolted. But this was nothing, except as cutting off our base and annihilating the authority of China in this region of the March. The real point was that the whole rage of this district was directed against ourselves, and against our own immediate peril had all those prayers and exorcisms been perpetrated in Satanee. For the famous thunderstorm of four days since, that had been born above our heads in the angry cliffs of the Bastion, had passed on down the valley, as we saw, and wreaked its full vengeance of hail on the young corn of Chago, destroying it for the year. It was perfectly evident to all concerned that only our unhallowed pryings into the secrets of the hills had provoked this manifestation of celestial wrath. Bitterly did the Chagolese now regret having allowed us to escape alive, and with promptitude had they set them-

selves to retrieve that initial error. They had, in fact, issued orders to all the villages and monasteries thereabouts in the whole region to join together in a holy war against these foreigners. Ga-Hoba was overwhelmed with the terror of the Tibetan abbeys all round, and now a crusading army of some three thousand strong was marching up the valley from Chago, intent, in simple piety, on nothing less than the immediate extermination of our whole party once and for all.

The emotions of that moment who shall depict? It became a case of immediately holding the Miao against the invaders, and selling our lives as dearly as possible when the moment came. But the absolute ruin of our plans was a much more grievous problem. Until one actually is killed, one never quite seriously believes one is going to be; there seems something rather grotesque and remote about the mere notion. Anyhow, these matters are salubriously to be left until one comes to them.

But now it was evident that all our hopes for the summer were blasted—blasted absolutely, blasted finally. In the first place, China, it seemed, had gone under, and her authority no longer had the slightest weight in the March; so that her guarantees were become waste paper, and her protection no longer even a name. Satanee might be, and was, unalterably loyal; but what could avail the loyalty of poor little Satanee against the combined hostility of all the Tibetan villages and abbeys of the district, set loose to their fullest evil devices by the fall of Siku, and assisted by the lawlessness of the Tepos away in the west, who assuredly would not fail to make their use also of this fine chance? Every way the outlook was hopeless for our work in these Alps. If the advancing mob did succeed in wiping

out our party, the question would obviously be satisfactorily solved, at least to one of the parties concerned; if, on the other hand, we succeeded, as was much more probable, in repelling their attack, with a few wounds, and perhaps at the cost of a life or two, our situation would still be only the more hopeless. For the Tibetans are a bull-dog race, long in the memory and tenacious in their purpose. The vendetta thrives handsomely in such a soil; they do not hurry, but they never fail of their vengeance. A small party such as ours, once it has awakened Tibetan wrath, can never again know a moment of security; its evil ending may be postponed, but cannot be averted. Let us drive off the attack, and even succeed in getting up to camp, the enemy would still be ceaselessly creeping round and spying from unsuspected gullies. One day, when we ourselves might be up in the mountain, there would be an invasion of the weakened camp, and we should return to find it wiped out and ourselves the mark of every sniper in the bushes as often as we chose to stand still for a moment. Thus, in the threatened assault, it could hardly be less fatal for us to conquer than to overcome.

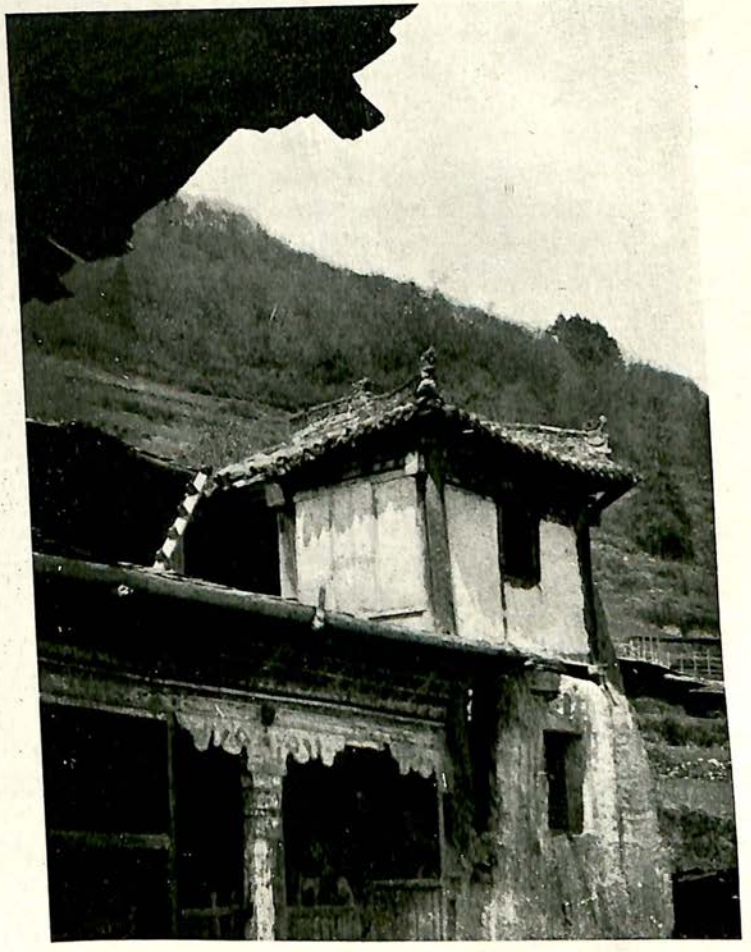
Now, however, the immediate matter was to prepare our defences. My teeth were chattering like castanets, what with the cold and the excitement of the moment. Fearing, like Charles I., a misconstruction, I caused the charcoal-pan to be lit, whereupon the untoward symptoms ceased. No solemn or appropriate thoughts would, however, occur; we were too busy posting our men and piercing loopholes for guns in the back wall of the rooms, so as to command the approach from that side. In point of fact, the Miao of Satanee offered admirable facilities for defence. The veranda commanded the courtyard, and the main gate, and the low line of cells

opposite, and the corner-door in the angle where these join on to the main church, which occupies all the upper side of the square. The outlook is good and unrestricted; two men can easily command the frontal approaches. Only remains the possibility of a flank attack round at the back of the rooms in which we lived, and by the little door that leads into the yard at our angle. This door can be secured by a man on guard, while our gun-holes in the back wall were arranged to sweep not only the approaches to the Miao on that side, but also to point immediately down on anyone who might be close under us, trying to force the wooden postern. Our force was seven: ourselves, Mafu, Go-go, Mee, the cook, and the brave small boy who had been Mafu's escort through that wild night over the pass from Ga-Hoba. Our armoury comprised that shotgun of erratic tendencies, a rifle, three revolvers, and a very elegant sword-stick that now got itself firmly stuck in its socket and quite refused to go either in or out, wearied with having been so incessantly on show up the road. We disposed our men and apportioned our defences, and constructed a laager all along the veranda-front of the big black boxes that contained our silver and our specimens and so forth. And thus, in a fine martial glow, we awaited the coming of the enemy and of the grey dawn.

The dawn was the first to appear, in a melancholy, quiet drizzle. I was off watch, enjoying a harassed doze, when the old chief headman knocked for admittance, and came up into the veranda. He was greatly excited by the situation, and vowed that he and his village would do everything possible in our behalf, first of all by dissuasion and warning, and then, if need pressed, up to the point of joining forces with ours in battle,

at the risk of incurring age-long vendettas with the Chagolese. The next to arrive was the old monk, urged to the intrusion by his wounded feelings that the district should so have disgraced itself with this inhospitality. In much agitation he came up and added his trembling word to the Shang-yu's; he knew all the monks of Chago, he said, and would speak with them duly in the gate, and recall them to a better mind. This was the first news he had had of peril threatening us from his religious brethren; though he had known that our situation was insecure, he had been attributing its uncertainties to the White Wolf rebellion in China. So, shaking with emotion, he took leave of us at last, and retired to his cell across the yard, where he betook himself to prayer with special emphasis and continuity. A little after this two men, Mahomedans, passed hastily by from the east, down the valley where the crusaders were gathered; they refused to stop or answer questions, and were evidently running away from something or somebody out in that direction. But as the drizzling dawn developed to a silvery pallor of day, it became plain that the enemy meditated no such immediate attack as we had prepared for, and some of the tension relaxed. It now became necessary to con the possible issues of the situation.

These were of the most depressing and difficult. Whichever direction of thought one took, the taste of blood was in one's throat. In the first place, it was obvious that we must instantly contrive some means of getting out of Satanee. Impossible to achieve our season's work in those mountains against the declared ill-will of the Tibetans; impossible to subject Satanee to the hostility of its neighbours incurred on our account. Therefore we must go. But whither, and how? Our



THE CHURCH OF THE MIAO FROM OUR VERANDAH

immense burden of silver and all those big black boxes were a fatal clog to our going, and our constant peril on the road in such times. Moreover, how were we to take it? No mules, donkeys, or beasts of burden were available in Satanee; only remained the chance of carriers. Here the Shang-yu came to our aid, and at last most of the adult population was pressed into the promise of carrying our train of baggage over the hills to Ga-Hoba, where mules might be got, though the inhabitants were by now much to heavily oppressed with terror of the Tibetans and the Wolves to spare any of their beasts to anyone at Satanee, and least of all to us, for having harboured whom the Chagolese were already holding them in fear of death. This matter being provided, we next had to consider the direction in which we proposed to escape. And now the full beauty of the situation became apparent.

For on all sides the way seemed closed to a small party not elaborately armed, and impeded by masses of treasure. Before us, in the first place, lay the gigantic wall of the Satanee Alps, blocking out all possibility of escape southwards. For though there *is* a track that winds and climbs amid their heights and recesses till at last it descends on Nan-Ping, this is only the wildest, dimmest trail through the woodland, so difficult as not often to be attempted even by men unburdened, and quite impassable for loads. Only three ways of escape, therefore, presented themselves: behind, over the Red Range, lay Siku, and in front of us lay the valley of the Satanee Hor. But Siku had fallen to the Wolf, and offered no hope of harbourage; to walk into the jaws of the Wolf seemed suicidal folly. To say nothing of the chances of meeting his marauding bands on the road, and being efficiently stripped before we even got there.

The eastward road down the valley, again, was blocked by the army of the crusaders, which we now learned was massed in a pause about half-way up from Chagola, waiting to see what we were going to do. There only remained the westward road, away into Tibet. And this would be but the frying-pan to the fire of the Chagolese. For out in that direction the country was occupied only by the Black Tepos, robbing Tibetan tribes, who know no laws and own no authority but their own, reiving and murdering as they please, and as fertile in cunning as ferocious in attack.

It was at first thought that we might skirt their region, and be convoyed for four days west by the villagers of Satanee till we came to the mart of Yang-pu, and were able to strike away up to Ardjeri in the Prince of Jo-ni's land. This possibility was suggested by a little purple-clad novice, who now came up to join the gabbling conclave on the steps of the church; and for a time it smiled upon us, despite the fact that it must entail two critical days of delay while the carriers were collected and voluminous strings of copper cash got over for payment from Ga-Hoba. But in time it appeared that this Ardjeri of his was not the Ardjeri that Purdom knew of, safe in Jo-ni land under the eye of China, but a quite different Ardjeri, far away in the wildest heart of the Tepo country, from which, even if we succeeded in getting there, we should run scarcely any chance of getting away again alive, and none whatever of getting away intact and unrobbed.*

In these grey deliberations the long day wore away, as tedious as any prolonged suspense in a dentist's

* The official spelling is Archüeh, but in pronunciation the name approaches nearest to the sound of Ardjeri, with the *r* so scamped as almost to be elided.

ante-room. There comes a point, providentially, when a whirling multiplicity of counsels drives you beyond bothering any more about any of them for the moment, and you take refuge in the hope that, if you suffer the chaos to subside, some sediment of certainty may at last appear at the bottom of the problem. Leaving the conclave to continue its discussions, I ate a little food, and then, as there was still no sign of the crusaders, I sallied forth with Go-go up into the sacred forest after Primulas, with much caution and prying and peering round, and a fine sense of melodrama. I felt like some hero out of Wardour Street sallying forth from the beleaguered fortress for essential water; but there was no help for it, unless all the Satanee Primulas were to escape my net. I could have wept to feel that there was now no hope of the Grand Violet or Silvia or the Rock-nymph; but the Wood-nymph at least I could get, and get it I meant to. Up into the steep grove we hastened, keeping a watchful eye on that far-off wooden chorten down in the remote slopes of the valley below Satanee, for round that bend the track must bring the crusaders if they came. Nothing, however, appeared, as nothing usually does appear when you have reason to expect it. With scout-like bobbings and ambuscades in successive bushes I prolonged the picturesqueness of the exploit, but it was all no good. Tamely at last, and without ill-event, I was back inside the Miao with my burden of Primulas.

I found the Ardjeri plan now completely abandoned, but any definite scheme no nearer attainment than before. However, with the change and rest one approached the problem with a fresher mind; and now, faced by the plain impossibility of going either east, west, or south, cold logic forced us upon the only other

alternative. After all, *had* Siku fallen? Rumour said so; but then Chinese rumour is a bird of even gayer plumage than elsewhere. Even if it had, even if it were now in full possession of the Wolf, the Wolf was himself Chinese, and therefore much more likely to respect the foreigner than any wild Tibetan of the March. To say nothing of the fact that the magnitude of his movement seemed to show in him serious ambitions, in which case it would be his first object to show every consideration to foreigners, so as not to alienate European sympathy from any kingdom or dynasty he might be planning. The danger of his subsidiary robber bands marauding round the country on their own was a thing we should anyhow have to face; meanwhile, we decided that the worst possibilities in China were better than those of Tibet, and resolved to stake everything on the uncertainty of rumour, and the chance that Siku might, after all, not be in quite the desperate state that local gossip represented. Better, anyhow, to return to the shelter of an Empire that has a great prestige and a great responsibility, however much they both may be invalidated for the moment, than to adventure yet farther into the wilderness of the March, where the everlasting lawlessness would certainly have received a fine fillip from the temporary collapse of China. The Shang-yus both applauded our decision, and the news of it went abroad. The carriers were ordered for dawn of the next day, and the pressure of the situation seemed over, more especially as no word came from Ga-Hoba, which seemed to show more quietude and less urgency in that direction.

And next, on the publication of our intended departure, there surged upon the veranda the portly form of Abbot Squinteyes. For the last few days of brewing

trouble he had been conspicuous for his absence. But now, who more astonished, astounded, horripilated, bemused by all these happenings than this innocent and holy man? Until this moment not a word had come to his ears of any evil intended to us. How could such things be? How was such wickedness possible on earth? To attack people so good, so kindly, so beneficent in every way. Oh never, never could it be believed that any of his confraternity had had art or part in any proceedings so infamous! Thus the abbot, in a gabbling flood of asseveration, protestation, exclamation, exculpation. Tears filled his squinting eyes; he projected himself passionately upon my bosom, he seized both my hands and patted them and squeezed them and fondled them so ardently between every sentence that I began backing pavidly away in momentary terror of being kissed. In point of fact, the good prelate had primed himself for this expedition, and was now more than a little gone in drink. No power could detach him from me; even when I took refuge in my bedroom he pursued me, voluminously expatiating on his own purity and innocence of purpose till it became more and more abundantly obvious that his own part in the late proceedings had been of the most shady. His vicars were less ebulliently vinous in their virtue, but all the ecclesiastics of Satanee were in the same tale; and now turned up a tall and very handsome monk, actually an emissary from Chago itself, arrived to spy out the land, our defences and purposes, on plea of asking us for medicine on behalf of some person and symptoms unknown, both of them, in all probability, diplomatic myths to cover his coming. He heard straight talk immediately from all our servants and from the assembled villagers in the courtyard.

Disclaiming, like all the rest of his cloth, any responsibility for the trouble, and any seriousness in the situation, he was duly treated to a long litany of our virtues, and Chagolese iniquities, in which a leading part was taken by a plain lady of easy virtue and a large goitre, who indefatigably proclaimed our probity and solvency. He displayed a holy pleasure on hearing this favourable tale, embroidered on the theme of his own cordial agreement, and finally departed down the valley with beaming smiles, to take his own construction of the scene to the crusading forces. The meeting ended in high pleasantness. Most of the village was in our yard by this time, and a little amateur wrestling diversified the evening. And so ended as long a day as I have ever lived through, and the one most various in emotions. By this time I felt almost too tired even to think, but the darkness at last began to find out my nerves. Every time I heard a dog bark in the blackness outside I wondered if it was only at some old woman coming home from the fields; and as for the roar of a far-off beck by night, it will be long before I am able quite to enjoy it as I used. And, in this weltering uncertainty of rumours and counter-rumours, one finds oneself hurrying back to primitive stages, and seeking solutions in omens and luck and other such futilities of the feeble-wit.

The morning of the exodus was one interminable chaos. Gradually the promised carriers accumulated, the youngest and strongest rushing, very prudently, for the smallest and lightest boxes. The pandemonium grew: everybody jibbed and grumbled at his burden at the top of his voice. The whole fourteen struck at last for more pay, and expressed doubts as to our powers of paying the remaining sum that would

be due when we got to Ga-Hoba. Their own headmen were powerless to compose them, and nothing availed till at last the Mafu took one of his salubrious fits of rage, and danced about screaming like a mad and drunken gorilla in a passion. This appalling spectacle produced its effect, and after at least three hours of discussion and preparation we began to file disconsolately out of the Miao about six o'clock in a sad, appropriate day of gloom, ardently escorted by Abbot Squinteyes, now sobered, but still excessively effervescent with innocence and affection. His protestations, however, were yet further discounted by the fact that in the moment of our departure numbers of hitherto unsuspected monks emerged from his quarters and departed in diverse directions over the hills, each bearing to his own monastery the news of our removal.

The abbot, however, had fallen yet farther in our disfavour that morning. The final packings had given occasion for a free distribution of presents to most of the inhabitants, including the Shang-yu and the lady with the goitre and Squinteyes and his vicars. And the abbot, not content with his gift of rubbings of religious subjects from the sacred stones of Sian-fu, had cast covetous eyes on the highly coloured Pink Pill almanacs in which the Shang-yu was rejoicing. With a bland smile his holiness proceeded to collar them, without word of protest from his victim; and, in reply to our remonstrances, smiled yet more blandly and was wholly unable to understand. Nobody dared counter the Parocco, representative of the Potalà, not even the responsible head of the village, representative of the Dragon Throne. Such are the relations of Church and State in Satanee. No wonder that Abbot Squinteyes is not loved by his parishioners, who tell sad tales of

the bottle, and of the two ladies in his house who do not even pretend not to be his left-handed wives, and of the general omnivorousness of his appetites in every realm of nature. Therefore we parted coldly from him. But quite undaunted, more profuse than ever of smiles and devotion, he pursued us through the rain, out into the mud of the lane, insisting on a final fondling of our hands. Frigid was the nod he got as we went, but a full bow was the portion of the old monk, who had forborne to pester our preparations for departure, but in the moment of our moving out of the yard appeared upon the threshold of his cell, saluting us with gentle blessings and farewells.

The still and weeping dawn had given place to a calm, silvery day. Far ahead of me, winding in and out along the ascending convolutions of the down, proceeded the string of bearers, looking like a procession of large square black beetles beneath the box that each man bore, things so huge and so heavy that I could not wonder at their having overtaxed even the patience of a Tibetan peasant. My white pony so vehemently ascended the slopes that I was quite exhilarated, though annoyed to have a glimpse of the brilliant lilac, unattainable as ever, in a flare of purple vagueness down on the cliff in the valley beneath, across the glacial-looking waters of the Satanee Hor. I averted my mind violently from the humiliation of this enforced departure and from all thought of the treasures we were losing, presumably for ever, in the sombre gullies of the Bastion. Luckily, all the Alps were veiled in storm, and quite unguessable, so that I was not affronted with the anguish of leaving them behind. No stirring event marked our ascent of the pass out of the valley of the Satanee Hor. By the time I reached the top I was far ahead

of the rest, so paused to go forward prudently and prospect. The folds of the cultivated lands down and down to Ga-Hoba looked very much as usual, and I could detect no sign of agitation. I was recalled to the realities of the situation, however, and the facts of the melodrama that is life, by now meeting with the most evil monk I have yet set eyes on—a scowling, wicked, great face, under a broad-brimmed hat on the lines of St. Jerome's—hurrying along, in his deep scarlet boots, down over the mud and stones of the pass to take some message of iniquity to the monks of Satanee. The Shang-yu, who now rejoined me, greeted him with the universal courtesy of the region. "Whither away?" said Shang-yu. That bodeful figure stood eyeing me with a malevolence impossible to describe, and made no answer. "Whither away?" repeated Shang-yu, with a smile and a bow. "Mind your own business!" curtly replied that unholy person, averting for the moment his malign glance from mine, and then tramped steadily forward upon his wicked ways.

With modified pangs, accordingly, I was able to leave the pass and descend on Ga-Hoba, gathering a burden of the little bird-e'en Primula as I went, together with moss to wrap the treasures. Coming into Ga-Hoba was like returning home, though it was evident, even from afar, that the place was in a bustle on our account. "There they are! there they are!" cried the women in the fields from hill to hill, as we came into view over the brow. We could see that we were the general topic. Now met me the Mee, running up the hill with his hideous mask aglow in the most appealing radiance of rapture, donned to order, but perfectly irresistible; and conveyed me down to the inn, where Tanguei and Mar-Mar beamed upon us with welcome and patted us so persistently; and

talked so copiously that their delight in seeing us safe and sound was very plain. It seemed that they had been threatened with death by the Chagolese for taking us into their house at all, a stretch of insolence from a Tibetan village to a Chinese that would have been inconceivable in the days of the Grand Dowager. But now all order was dissolved for the moment, and the Chagolese had not scrupled to send their emissaries to every place throughout the district which was either in the neighbourhood of a monastery or under the immediate influence of one, summoning everybody, no matter how indifferent or reluctant, to join in the jehad against the foreign invader. At which news a primitive revengefulness thrilled in my veins, and I looked forward vaguely to some day of triumph in which I might return gloriously to Satanee and be a humble means of teaching the Chagolese better sense. My name, in Chinese character, stands for law and order; if this fact has any meaning, I am indeed a thing with which the Chagolese deserve to be drilled into a wholesome intimacy.

Ga-Hoba was in a ferment, and even here, among the crowds, I discerned the watchful purple figure of a monk from the neighbouring village of Wu-Ping along the slope, which, quite against its will, had been lured into the crusade by the fiery energies of the Chagolese. He was evidently come in to report, refused all overtures, and finally departed across the fields to tell the tale, as soon as he had ascertained, in the general talk, that we were now actually on our road to Siku. It was time, for half of Ga-Hoba had already fled, under pressure of Tibetan threats, and the other half was packed and ready to follow, not in fear of any White Wolves, but because of this incursion threatened from Chago on our

account. None the less, we held a royal reception, with all our goods and chattels exposed for show, to the general amazement, the nightmare-feeling of the last four-and-twenty hours now quite vanishing in this atmosphere of jovial good-fellowship.

Darker and darker, however, as we drew nearer, were the tales of the fate of Siku; and in Ga-Hoba such terror reigned of venturing in that direction, that when we rose the next morning it was to find that three of our promised mules had been allowed, or encouraged, to bolt during the night, and no more offered. It needed yet another terrific explosion of the Mafu's to bring to light three more to make up, and after many a wearisome scene of storm and protest it was nine before we got off from Ga-Hoba with a job-lot of animals, and at the cost of such a tempest of whacks and screams raging round me, as I sat passive and stately, that under my marble impassiveness I felt all of a tremble, like Mrs. Caudle. It was a grey morning as we left, and behind us the Satanee Alps rose forbidding and sad; straight in the middle of the picture from Ga-Hoba stands up the sullen leonine head of Chagoling, parent of all our enemies and disasters. So, revolving the gloomy thoughts appropriate to the moment, we set off on our wild adventure, that seemed yet wilder when at every turn of the road, wherever a peasant was met, we heard more and more horrific tales of the fall of Siku, and its present condition. True, everyone told a different tale, but it was all a crescendo of horror, and everybody converged upon the one central and sure fact, that the great bridge across the Blackwater had been broken down, so that we should not be able to get over to the Siku side, whatever the state of affairs might be in the town itself.

My own first attempt was infelicitous. For the Go-go and I, not knowing the way, rode up the long steep flights of steps above the little monastery on the wooded slope over the village, and duly emerged upon the ascent of the red downs that lead up towards the Red Range. Here we continued along and along very blandly, secure in the plain path, from which the white horse was rebuked when he tried, at one point, to diverge down into the gully. On and on we went until, seeing a rosy blink in a bank of coppice above a rill, I recognised Silvia, and leapt off to secure her, only just in time to perceive the whole caravan, about two miles down the valley behind me, on the very point of winding out of sight over a distant down. Back we proceeded, with fury in our hearts, to discover the superior wisdom of the white horse, and ultimately to overtake the caravan; and learnt that the way I had been following led only into robber-land, and that knots of brigands had already been seen dodging about among the bushes as I so innocently ascended that shallow upland trough of the hills.

The climb of the Red Range is devious and long. The culmination of the path brings you to a series of shallow little grassy glades leading to an alpine plateau of some nine thousand feet. No flowers were yet evident, except bright golden bunches of a small marsh marigold beside the rills, with Silvia occasionally flaunting from the coppiced cliffs below the col, and rosy Peonies beginning very prettily to blush amid the scrub. From the summit a marvellous view breaks upon you with dramatic abruptness. Behind, the huge ramparts of the Satanee Alps were mercifully veiled by now in cloud, but the cleared day shone golden and blue in sunlight on the pinnacled white wall of the distant Min S'an, away in the north-west, culminating, to our left, in the

stupendous crystalline splendours of Thundercrown. From this high pass, with the lesser ranges far away below, and the deep bed of the Blackwater far away down below these in the grilling channel of its valley, the mountains seem of almost unbearable magnificence and altitude as you stand beside the little shrine that perches on the brink of the descent. As we waited, while the mule-men made here their orisons to the Divine, it was some consolation for our late loss to realise that Siku lay immediately amid the roots of a mountain as magnificent as any we had left, now confronting us from far above the hugeness of the intervening hills in the full splendour of its bulk, recalling the Dent Parrachée from Lanslebourg, but on a much grander scale, and with advantage of being seen from a much higher relative altitude.

The descent is through a wilderness of coppice, down and down and down indefinitely; there is no way of conveying to you the bigness of these hills. At the immediate base of the first pass, by the foot of a long steep coppice of oak and flowering shrubs and Armand's pine, where for the last time, and in poor form and rare, you set eyes on the lovely Dipelta, lies the strong village of Mö-Ping, secure at the head of a gigantic gorge that now leads down and down again in sombre and splendid ravines which recall that of the Lorina, though more open and not so dark, till at length it debouches on the valley of the Blackwater. When we passed through Mö-Ping on that 22nd of May, the banks of copse just underneath the village and down to the beginning of the gorge were such a riot of beauty as I have never seen before or since—a tangled blaze of snowy Deutzia, golden Forsythia, honeysuckles and roses in plumy or cloudy weights of snow, or sheaves of softest pink.

No shrubbery, of even the richest, has ever shown me such a prodigal wild surf of unanimous loveliness.

Then, leaving the golden radiance of the afternoon slanting on those jungles of colour, you plunge into the dark profundities and descend steeply to the Well of Weeping Fairies. For here a little bridge spans the torrent just below a mighty volume of trees and bushes that seems to sprout in the sheer dark precipice, overhanging a high projecting mass of moss, from which bright lances of water perpetually fall glittering into the beck beneath. In autumn the blaze of gold and scarlet in that cold dark place seems almost like a living fire lit in a cellar, and the dimly gleaming darts of water from the cushion of deepest emerald moss seem like the constant tears of imprisoned fairies in the thraldom of that gloomy ravine.

It was not till we began at last emerging from the long windings of the glen that the first signs of popular excitement occurred. Gradually the valley widened out into a smiling glen, heavy with the ample verdure of Persimmons, and enshrining a little village in forests of bright green willow. And here the inhabitants were massed to meet us on the small wooden bridge and along the banks; and, having watched our caravan pass, immediately hurried along the hill above to spread the tale below, and join the larger and larger crowds that grew denser as we advanced towards the Blackwater. Now we were quite out of the mountain-country, and the dry ridge opposite that had seemed nothing from above towered so far into the sky as to seem a perfect Bernina; and it was all as hot, as bare, thirsty, and lifeless, as the similar districts of the same Blackwater through which we had so ardently sweated about Kiai-jô not so very long since (though now it seemed

like years). It was almost impossible to realise that the high Alps were so near, and that immediately behind that huge wall of barren mountain opposite there rose yet huger the last fading spine of the Min S'an. Incredible, until at last we descended the cobbled street of flat-roofed Nain Dzai,* huddled in many tiers of houses up its little hill above the Blackwater, and came suddenly into sight of the big river again, flowing voluminous in all its filth down the long valley of windings between the blazing ochre-coloured mountains. For that far view, sweltering and Egyptian in the soft warmth of a May evening, was closed in the distance by the whole enormous mass of Thundercrown, piling Pelion upon Ossa of peak and crag and precipice in castellations of snow and ice to the virginal gleam of its rounded summit.

Nain Dzai is a particularly charming small place, of a character quite to itself, with its line over flat line of level roofs, which in the season are turned to so many thatches of gold with the gathered corn. It dominates the beck along which we have been emerging out of the back of the Red Range, just at the junction where the clean, innocent little stream passes out into the dark Nirvana of the Blackwater. It has, outside the village, along the hill, a curly-roofed two-towered temple of unusual richness and Chineseness of effect, from which you have your best command of that wonderful westward view, with the comfortable village lying below, and the furious ugly river roaring down upon you like a coiling dragon through that blistered, blasted land of dun-

* Properly romanised as Nan Yü Jai (Southgorgeborough). But I keep my own name, as representing the exact sound into which these syllables are confounded in the syncopations and rapidity of ordinary Chinese speech.

coloured downs and crags and ruins; while over all this Sahara the superb mountain asserts the full force of its majesty, at the top of the picture, filling the sky.

But prospects, however peaceful and splendid, were not just then our concern; and eagerly did we address ourselves for news to the buzzing throngs that surged round us in Nain Dzai, where evidently our arrival only put the coping-stone on the intense general excitement. Only later did we understand the full reason of this; for in the fury and stress of the times the inhabitants, seeing a large rich caravan advancing out of the perilous and inhospitable hills, believed that these must be, not honest people anxious to escape from being ravaged, but the very ravagers themselves. For a few brief glorious moments I myself was even invested with all the glamour of being the White Wolf in person. However, these instants of emotion passed, and we were submerged in a mob of people all convulsively telling us different tales. The one sure fact that emerged above the babble was that there, before our eyes, hale and hearty and perfectly intact, stood that famous bridge across the Blackwater whose destruction at the hands of the Wolf had been the one point on which all gossip had agreed. This gave us better hope of yet finding even Siku still standing, and, disentangling ourselves from the seething hordes of Nain Dzai, we addressed ourselves to the crossing.

It was our first experience of a big Tibetan bridge. And big it is, and very wide and very wild is the volume of muddy water that it has to span in one superb leap. From each side, one over another, and each layer projecting farther and farther out, are built huge tilted pine-trunks in strata, until gravity will let them go on farther. But then the intervening gap between the

THE BLACKWATER BRIDGE AT "NAIN DZAI" (NAN YÜ CHAI)

two halves of the bridge is now narrow enough to be spanned by very long planks. So that there behold the bridge complete (and with the advantage of being capable of being put out of action in five minutes at need), towering across the Blackwater in a high bold arch, necessitated by the slant imposed, so as to carry out the tiers of poles on either bank to a sufficient distance. But it is not a bridge to ride across in careless ease. For, quite apart from the fact that nothing could hope to fall into the Blackwater and live, these Tibetan bridges, despite their elaborate structure and their permanence, have an airy elegance that causes them to wave and float beneath one's tread like a reed shaken in the wind. Burdened mules have a just distaste for such structures, and it was long before our string could be coaxed across, each by each, with one man pulling at its nose and another cajoling it firmly by the tail; while beneath their doubtful steps the whole bridge oscillated and swung till it was with a sigh of real relief that I at last saw the procession safe across without loss of a single pack. For a little while, in the relaxation of triumph, we lay and rested on the dusty stretches among the willow groves. The evening was meltingly soft and warm and peaceful; no sound stirred; it seemed unbelievable that anywhere in the world there should be war and fire and misery of man. More and more plain did it become to us that Siku must still be standing pretty well where it did. At last we rose and proceeded towards it to make sure.

The way up the valley of the Blackwater towards the base of Thundercrown is typical of the dry land region: the hateful dead Asphodel reappears, and the grey-flannel Buddleia flaunts from all the sheerest, hottest cliffs, more patient of Sahara than its lovely cousin,

who sweeps in long streaming cascades from all the loess cliffs about Nain Dzai, like a gracious small-leaved weeping-willow when it is not in flower, and a sheer waterfall of soft purple when it is.* The ground is bony and hot and bare and poor; only here and there, by dint of patient efforts, have patches of stony ground been made capable of culture by the laborious compilation into low walls of their larger stones. And here and there, indeed, in the ten miles between Nain Dzai and Siku, there are little bays of kindlier nature; but on the whole that road, though possessing none of the savagery that marks the descent of the Blackwater from Kiai-jô to the south, is over a grim, forbidding land, enlivened only by the typical flowers of the desert region. A sky-blue Onosma unfurls its croziers of very narrow pendent bugles that have the misfortune to arouse comparison with the incomparable loveliness of *Lithospermum graminifolium;* and the stony Provençal-looking sward of the slopes is studded by many tidy small domes of vegetation, of which the most conspicuous in May are the blue-grey hedgehogs of a little convolvulus,† tight amid the thorny tangles of whose rounded wig sit rosy trumpets of the most entrancing bright pink, making one think of *Dianthus neglectus* flickering its fires among the tussocks on Moncenisio.

But it is a rocky and forbidding strip of country; small wonder the Wolves thought little of its charms. Occasionally the monotony of the torrid stony stretches, the climbs, the descents, the picking of a perilous way among boulders of the Blackwater, is broken by stretches more repulsive yet—enormous landslides of mud and filth and mineral refuse that suggest nothing

* *B. alternifolia*, F. 100.

† *C. tragacanthoeides*, F. 98.

CONVOLVULUS TRAGACANTHOEIDES

so much as some titanic slag-dump, descending from the upper fells in a crevassed gigantic glacier of chaos and blackness and dirt, just like the excrement of a smelting-works. But as you approach Siku the defences of the town grow plainer and the road gets wilder, being forced to ascend round the brows and up the flanks of the various precipice-headlands that begin to enclose the river; each high bend is open to the view of the next, a mile ahead, and all of them to the high curly watch-tower that crowns the acropolis of Siku round the corner, whence any couple of rifles could hold the eastward approach to Siku against an army. For there is no way except that one.

In the warm sunset we drew near to the final climbs and dips. Already at the perched gatehouse up ahead of us a crowd was gathering, and at the end of the long day I did not dare make myself too unpopular with delaying over the lovely and astounding apparition of a high-alpine Androsace in places where one would have thought only a cactus could have been comfortable. Yet there it was, shining in little sheets and drifts of snow across those blazing rocks and stony banks, with all the loveliness and essential character of the Glacial Androsace as you see it making mats of solid pink in the highest moraines of the Schwarzhorn. Even so, but with larger flowers and of the purest white, does *A. longifolia* enamel the inhospitable hot rocks about Siku; it is as if you should find *A. alpina* on the sun-flogged rocks of Portofino.* Tearing myself away very reluctantly from this treasure, I continued in the caravan and round the last corner. Now one more

* And it behaves as such in the garden hitherto, as eagerly craving for the torrid conditions of Siku as *A. alpina* for the gauntest alpine shingles.

descent, and round another bend immediately beneath the steep dip of the town wall, where the curly tower looks proudly out from its high perch above the blazing bare slopes, and all the coffins are lodged stark on the steep hillside; and round the corner you come immediately under the city wall and enter by the south gate.

By this time it was evident that Siku still stood; but it was also evident that the most intense excitement raged. Dense crowds accompanied us from the last gatehouse to the city, and grew denser yet when we had entered the walls. A buzz of gossip filled the air, and not even the most impressive immobility of demeanour could quell the passions of the crowd. From afar the tumultuous hordes came flocking to escort us in, and it soon became plain that here, as at Nain Dzai, our arrival had created frantic terror. This soon passed into bewildered amazement; and, from their fear of us as robbers, the people swung round into open-mouthed amazement that we had not been robbed, that with all that burden of goods and chattels, and all that string of mules, we had been able successfully to traverse the wild country outside, where nobody in Siku had dared for some weeks to poke his nose—no, not so much as half a mile beyond the city walls.

On every account, therefore, we richly fed the public appetite for sensation, and on a sort of wave of hysteria were swept up the streets and into the backwash of a dark and ominous-looking little inn, where we had hardly begun to unfold our goods when down came both the Mandarins in state to call, and expatiated almost with tears on their profound relief to have got us safe at last inside the gates of Siku. I had hoped, after the long day, that I might elude ceremonial, and stay forgotten

on the flat roof enjoying the cool twilight; but the occasion was much too august, and in a very few minutes I was summoned down to honour the multitudinous courtesies of Great Lord Jang and Great Man Pung, respectively the civil and the military Governor of Siku. The tiny pitch-black room was packed to overflowing, and its primeval gloom of smoke and grime, rendered more visible by the feeble vacillations of an oil wick, only made our mutual moppings and mowings of politeness seem more than ever like the incantations of gnomes. However, all went very well; and they were so overjoyed to have us there, after the incessant anxieties on our account with which they had been harried of late by the Viceroy, that we were made to feel quite as if we had got home to loving friends. Compliments and courtesies flowed in a spate, and the meeting concluded in the warmest satisfaction of all concerned. Finally, attended by their trains, the Great Men took their leave, with promises of seeing us again on the morrow; and we were at last able to close the long agitating day with food and such defensive precautions as seemed best fitted to avert the bugs that the dark little place so plainly promised.

CHAPTER XI

SIKU: CHUNG LI-TO

Siku lies in a deep warm bay beside the river, and beyond, in the west, there is nothing but the untracked wilderness of Tibet, not half a dozen miles away through the defiles of the burnt gravelly mountains that here close in the Blackwater. In front, below the southern suburb, sweeps the warship-coloured tide of the river, with lumps of gold in its shingles; but the citizens depend for their water on the countless springs and fountains that gush out, clear as diamond, in the silvery shade of the willow groves within the walls or just beyond. The whole town is embedded in a sea of verdure—palm and fig and poplar and Persimmon—and over the streets loom the rounded chrysoprase clouds of the Acacia. It sits below the debouchure of the huge gorge that breaks from the Min S'an ridge up behind, of which here and there a russet point can just be seen from the city, immeasurably far overhead, peering straight down on it above the rampart of the loess downs and the fantastic wooded crags above. The delta of that dead beck is vast and wide, and of so level a descent that you can hardly realise it is a descent at all until you have achieved the two miles or so from Siku up to the entrance of the Great Gorge, and, looking back, now see the little town slumbering in verdure amid the stretches of its corn and millet fields, on a

SIKU: FROM THE AKROPOLIS, LOOKING TO THE NORTH GATE:
THUNDERCROWN IMMEDIATELY ABOVE, OUT OF SIGHT IN THE CLOUD

much lower level than yourself, far away down that slanting V-shaped vale of whitened, barren shingles, from which here and there the laborious peasants have cleared away the pebbles into ramparts, and won growing-room for yet another strip of crop. On either side Siku and its delta are embraced behind by the diverging arms of the arid loess downs, here cloven by the outlet from the Gorges; and in the warm nook thus afforded by their protection enjoys a climate often tropical and always of the most delicious sheltered warmth, basking in every ray of the sun, and visited by neither wind nor draught. These hills are torrid, in fact, as the foothills of Provence, ochre-coloured, blazing, dusty; dirty salt is pecked from them in holes, and strenuous goats browse over their hot stony steeps after the few rare and wiry plants that film their nakedness. And then, immediately above these, so immediately impending over the town that their height is diminished and foreshortened, rise the accumulated flanks, buttresses, and bastions of Thundercrown, seeming to slant away back to the snow-corniced summit, so far above. And the Great Ridge sweeps round thence from Thundercrown in a huge semicircle, whence the Gorges tear their way down between rank over rank of wild fantastic pinnacles above the woodland, chaotic and splendid as a dream. Looking up from Siku, you see wall over wall of precipice and peak enclosing the Gorges, and shooting higher and higher towards the crest of the Great Ridge behind. Their magnificence begins abruptly, hardly two miles behind the town, where the loess hills are suddenly cut off by a prominence of the main limestone mass, and on its three thousand feet of forested pinnacle the Pink Temple soars towards heaven, dominating the town and all the valley, and the many

other minor temples that squat on eminences of the loess crumples all the way up the fells from the shrine of the Ninety-nine-year Water immediately by the foot of the aspiring precipice at top of the long shingle-delta, where the coffined dead are lodged in crevices, and from their riven planks the grey-flannel Buddleia flaunts in special amplitude in the hottest nooks.

To the Pink Temple we made our first expedition outside the walls of Siku. For immediately behind the Pink Temple ascends a very steep, high slant of what looked like finest cool alpine turf, amid broken outcrops of cliff standing out from the yet higher chaos of the Great Ridge above. It was not, indeed, for some days that we could make the venture, for many preliminaries had to be gone through in the way of consolidating our friendship with the two Mandarins and appeasing the alarms of the townspeople. The day after our arrival we duly returned the calls of the two Governors. Great Lord Jang occupied a shabby cramped Yamun under the eastern gate, where the city wall climbs along the rib of hill jutting out to the acropolis. He was anxious that we should take up our quarters there, but was afraid we might not find them adequate; so with much politeness, and many bows and snortings of courtesy, we parted from that huge and portly figure in rich satins and a bowler hat, exactly recalling a G. K. Chesterton who had omitted to curl his hair, but had dyed it black instead. Afoot we proceeded along the crumbling little main street of the place to where, near the western gate, lie the vast and spacious derelict courts of the military Yamun, in which Great Man Pung has his habitation apart in a tiny court off the topmost yard; and here, beneath an arbour of pine-boughs and treillage of Convolvulus, dreams out the

long summer days over the opium pipe which alone consoles him for such a conclusion to his vicissitudinous career, rendering him indifferent to the raucous tones of Mrs. Pung the First (who "had money") whenever she happens to disapprove more than usual of Mrs. Pung the Second, a pudding-faced and pasty young person in wide trousers of blue chintz.

For Great Man Pung has had, indeed, a varied life. In appearance he is like a small and wizen Robespierre, with an active manner and a smile that reveals the twisted wisdom of Machiavelli combined with a certain sense of pathos in his own lot. He has travelled in almost all the provinces of the Empire, and has intimately known European customs in Shanghai and Peking. He has been in the train of the Amban to Holy Lhasa, and stood face to face with the Sovereign Pontiff; and he was also in the escort of the Grand Dowager when their Imperial Majesties fled to Sian.

And now here he ends up, embittered and broken and helpless, in this rude little wild country town at the farthest back of beyond, and on the last edge of nowhere in the heart of the inhospitable hills, where the dour population of refugee criminals from other provinces make no case of him or his office, and remain fixed against all awakenings in the immovable methods of bygone ages. He is grown a cross and waspish little man with these people, and no wonder. In China the military power is subordinate to the civil, and the active restlessness of Great Man Pung shines but in unwelcome contrast to the soft paternal geniality of his superior, Great Lord Jang, who is a jovial old soul, and all for peace and goodwill at any price. This, from the beginning, made the position of poor modern Mr. Pung the more hopeless; in the crusted and com-

placent medievalism of Siku he stands as forlorn and grotesque as a broken-down motor-bicycle in Stonehenge. Four years he has ruled, but his soldiers go on strike whenever the fancy takes them, leaving gates and city walls unguarded, and the Great Man himself all alone in the little side-yard of his wide but ruinous Yamun; all of which, with himself, family, guests, court, attendants, and garrison, he is supposed to maintain on his official salary of something like ten shillings a year, very rarely paid. Most of his time, accordingly, the Great Man spends in philosophic indifference beneath his arbour, lulled by the clamours of the Mesdames Pung; but when matters get very bad, and there is no money in the place except Mrs. Pung's dwindling portion, and no soldiers whatever, nor prospect of being able to pay them if there were, then Mr. Pung, more a philosopher than ever, puts on his finest silks and richly flowered brocades, and takes the street boldly, beneath a white paper topper confected on a wire frame by his wives, from beneath which he smiles out upon the world with a bold assurance which convinces everybody against their own sure knowledge that all is for the best with him in this best of all possible worlds.

It may be judged how cordially Mr. Pung hailed the arrival in Siku of two foreigners capable of understanding his point of view, receiving his hoarded complaints, and talking to him of the outer world from which he had so long been in exile. Nothing would serve him but that we must move into his Yamun, and take possession of a clean, new little court at the top, adjacent to his own. It was a charming place, and we were nothing loath. Up through the vast and grilling vacancy of the successive courtyards our goods were moved, to the inmost court behind the big folding

doors at the back of the main dais of justice, on which a gigantic monster disported itself in many colours—that awful dragon of Chinese justice, meant to remind every Governor of the bestial wickedness attaching to rapacity. Here we were all amply accommodated, and easily in reach of Mr. Pung next door whenever he felt inclined to step in for a little chat or a half-humorous monologue on the manifold stupidities of the Sikuese. But both he and Great Man Jang united in imploring us not to venture out of the city just at present, owing to the general agitation and upset of everybody's nerves; and though it was an almost unbearable pain to see above us that gorgeous unattainable mountain every day radiant in the glory of the early alpine summer, their point of view was so just that we could but yield to it, and trust to that law of the East which ultimately brings all one's wishes into one's grasp.

The moment, indeed, was certainly not propitious for excursions. For the city had by no means settled down from its alarm about the Wolf, from whose maw it had so barely escaped. Siku, as I say, sits at the last verge of China, not on any main road, but some ten miles up a side-track that leads onwards only into Tibet. Accordingly it is a very primitive, lonely, and *arrièré* little place, whose principal title to fame in the Empire is as an emporium for cheap wives. (Bargains in this line can be got here for about half a crown; clients come from provinces near and far, and even the Prince of Jo-ni does not disdain to reinforce his loves from Siku.) Its inhabitants never go out into the world, having no world to go out into, and their mental state at present is accordingly contemporary with William the Conqueror. They "keep themselves to themselves," and with excellent reason. For they are re-

cruited from among the various criminals or suspects of other provinces, who make away from justice to this remote and secure little Ultima Thule of refuge, where scruples are few and nobody can afford to be too inquisitive. Accordingly it is a population apart from most others—suspicious, lawless, unfriendly to novelty, crystallised in a sombre conservatism that hardly seems yet to be aware that even the Mings are gone to join Queen Anne. Its methods are primeval; its commerce hardly reaches beyond its own neighbourhood; its currency is confined to the endless strings of pierced pence, of which half a crown's value is a strong man's load; its garrison consists of a handful of tatterdemalions, armed with prehistoric muskets that have neither been fired nor cleaned for generations.

In other words, Siku takes you back many centuries in the Middle Ages. We should have stood little chance of being able to settle there in peace, and purchase our necessaries, had it not been for the services we rendered the town, and the steady friendship of the Great Men Jang and Pung. Strangers in Siku are looked on askance, and made the centre of many a legend. Had not Beresowky stayed there once, and stolen the moon at his departure? It appeared that this unlucky luminary had had a villegiatura in a certain stone outside the city wall, where she was usually to be found at home, but never there again after the Russians had taken their leave. What, then, could be expected of *us*, driven in on the wings of so wild a storm, and owning publicly our wish to ascend the fastnesses of Thundercrown, notoriously a mountain animated by the most energetic and vindictive fiends, who, on being in any way annoyed, were in the habit of issuing from the fathomless black lake that occupies the hollow of the

summit, and thence bombarding a bad world with cannon-balls and thunderbolts? Was this a work to be lightly attempted at any time, with the young crops springing, least of all in such a year as this, with the Wolves still prowling over the land? If the moon had gone last time, what security now for the blessed sun himself?

Siku, in point of fact, had had a very bad scare and a very narrow escape. The convolutions and complications of Chinese gossip never admit of any one tale being conclusively determined to be true, and between the romantic and the unromantic legends of the saving of Siku the reader may take his choice. The more prosaic story had it that the Great Lord Jang, clearly recognising the utter hopelessness of his city against the Wolf, had clubbed together with two or three of the richer tradespeople in the town to raise a certain sum of money, which had then been sent down the valley to where the Siku track joins the main north road, and there successfully been used to bribe the Wolf off his purpose of coming up to Siku. The other story tells that when the Wolf army met the divergence of the roads, some four miles east of Nain Dzai, they there found various innocent peasants hanging about, of whom they asked how far it might be to Siku. To which the peasants, instead of forty li, answered a hundred, with the result that the Wolves did not think it worth their while to diverge so far for a prey so notoriously poor, and along a road leading only into Tibet. Accordingly, despising Siku, they swept steadily on towards the north, and their harrying of Min-jô and Tao-jô; while those tactful peasants, being really Yamun runners from Siku in disguise, returned in triumph to the city they had saved. This is a beautiful tale, and only suffers from the extreme improbability that any

Yamun runner would ever have ventured forty li out of his town to meet the Wolf, in any circumstances, or any amount of disguises; their usual fashion being, if compelled to go on any perilous or unpleasing errand, to stop comfortably at the first farmhouse half a mile beyond the gate, stay there comfortably in bed for a few days, and then return with long, splendid tales of how they have fully accomplished their heroic task. However this may be, Siku was one of the only three towns in South Kansu that did not undergo the violent visitation of the Wolf; the two others were Wen Hsien and Shi-hor, both of which had also been blessed by our presence, which came therefore to be looked on as a palladium, and as such was cherished in Siku.

The news, meanwhile, was reassuring. For it was believed that the Wolves had now passed up behind us —as was indeed the case—in two converging streams towards Lanchow in the north, and to bar their farther advance the Mahomedan forces of the province were massed on Monk Mountain and Lotus Mountain, the last big outcrops of the parallel range that runs north of the Min S'an as the Satanee Alps run south of it, and so are the frontier fortresses of Lanchow against all attack from the southerly Marches of Tibet. But the Mahomedans are a very double-edged sword in the hands of a Chinese Government, and no Viceroy can be sure on which side they will really serve. So far they had shown no adverse sign, indeed, but if they chose to throw in their lot with the invaders, the fall of the capital was certain, together with the certainty of a new outbreak of the always-brewing Mahomedan rebellion in Kansu. Even their immobility, in fact, seemed ominous in the crisis. However, the Mahomedans, in this instance, were to pay dearly for their

indifference to the fate of their Chinese neighbours; and in the meantime nobody in Siku knew what was happening up north. For more than two weeks past no messenger or post had entered the town, or gone out of it, and there was a stillness of death abroad, till Siku seemed alone to continue a strange, suspended life in the void of a dead world. There was little to be done but pass the glorious days in hopes of some day getting up into the hills; and in the meantime having long Chinese robes of silk prepared in which one might more comfortably take constitutionals in the grilling heat along the wall—a creation of recent days, and very spick and span, accordingly, with a ramp so broad that two motors might drive along it abreast.

For Siku owes its present rank as walled city (though only really such a tiny place, of some thousand inhabitants at most) to that outburst of definite determination to control the March, which prevailed under Jao Erh Fung in the later years of the Grand Dowager. It was to be the armed watch-tower of South-West Kansu, and was duly circled with a wall which took eight years in the building, and now, in its idler moments, affords an admirable promenade for the townspeople. All along the battlements there lay little piles of stones under the parapet, prepared for the defence of Siku against the Wolf. But now, pending the return of more stirring times, the wall, so densely crowded with peering heads the day we rode beneath the gate, was soon left empty again; even the very guards deserted it, and quiet seemed to be reviving. The leading inhabitants were brought in to us by Mr. Pung to be introduced; all the proprieties passed, and it was considered permissible that we should explore at least that high green slope above the Pink Temple.

It was, as usual, a radiant morning for our setting out; and boiling hot was the long ascent of the crumpled downs behind the town. Not Aden could be more burning and barren. One ascends from rib to rib of gaunt loess, up deep torn gullies, ever coiling arduously towards crest over crest of torrid desolation. On the lower spurs squat blushing temples, and on the flanks of the hills it does not seem as if a goat could escape starvation, so scanty are the almost invisible sprouts of aster and tansy, broken only by the long crimson flares of *Hedysarum multijugum* in the more pebbly places. The whole ravinated line of fells seems like a vast charred skeleton. And still the Pink Temple looms far up ahead, amid the pine-trees on its pinnacle. But at last the ascent is achieved, and one enters the shade of the dry forest that fills the dip between the loess downs and the limestone peak of the shrine. A pleasant glade of coolness and shadow, and then one is out on the upper level of the loess, and able more clearly to see the geological arrangement of the country. For now you are in an almost strip flat of land, about half a mile deep, offering no hint of the three thousand feet drop behind you; and rising abruptly in front is the chaotic huge wall of the main Alps. These, then, are the backbone, and along their entire flank has accumulated this drift of loess, some three thousand feet in depth, in a bank averaging half a mile wide, far down into the base of which the Blackwater has cut its way. This upper shelf is, of course, of varying width, and subject to undulations of its own; yet as a flat shelf it may well be pictured, a long strip of upland cultivation, with little sunny villages nestling here and there in its folds, and comfortable farms on guard over their own territories. The one break in the loess bank is made

by the two gorges converging in simultaneous bursts through their naked walls of limestone down upon Siku; but beyond this the huge bank of downs begins again, and unfolds its smiling altitudes down the distant view, away and away beneath the diminishing wall of the ridge.

The Pink Temple stands sentry over the gorges, some three thousand feet beneath. From the band of upland plain its eminence looks a small fantastic peak, like some detail of a Chinese landscape rising from a plain of cornfields. Up the narrow arête one climbs steeply beneath the shade until the spur concludes in the sharp summit, on three sides of which the precipice falls through the trees sheer to the valleys far below. The Pink Temple is crowded upon this little peak amid the pines, a succession of wee, wee yards in front of wee, wee shrines, where gods and Buddhas mingle in harmony, and Our Lady of Mercy, flanked by angels, sits sweetly smiling out across the sound of prayer from her little cavern of rockwork. It is, indeed, all "a smiling out across the sound of prayer" from this high place. For microscopic in the vale below lies Siku, as if you could throw down a stone and cover it all; and its aspirations have far to rise to the feet of Our Lady, whose smile thus ranges untrammelled over the world, intercepted only by the Alps of Satanee across the distance.

For from the Pink Temple is unfolded for the first time, and most dramatically, the characteristic prospect which is the special marvel of the Thundercrown Ridge. Down at your feet, and remote to east and west, you command the panorama of the Dry Lands and the long windings of the Blackwater. Then above these stretches the high barrier of the Red Range above Ga-Hoba, on this northern side a sombre wall of wood-

land, in serrations and ups and downs, utterly dwarfing the giant fells of loess along its base. But then, far above all this, so high in the sky that its details are lost amid the delicate pine-boughs that wave and weep about the Pink Temple, rolls out across heaven the tremendous line of the Satanee Alps, unearthly in their overwhelming splendour (never before so fully revealed and to so advantageous a frontage), westward from the last upheaval of Chagoling, through the self-contained majesty of the Felsenhorn and all the unfolded towers of the Castleberg citadels, to peak beyond peak of hitherto unsuspected magnificence away into the loneliness of Tibet. I have seen no view that quite has the qualities of this. One of Europe's most magnificent is that of the enormous snows from the Ortler to the Bernina, as you see them dominating all the pleasant foothills of Italy from the Torsoleto Ridge. And in a sense the situation is here much the same, *vis-à-vis* the mountains. But the lines of the Ortler and the Bernina are leisurely and spacious; they have nothing of the tearing ferocity, the towering upward leaps and darts of the Satanee pinnacles, that give them so appalling an impression of height and size that they seem to be striking at you over all the intervening gulfs of the distance. Nor does the Italian view give you anything to compare with that gulf, which seems so deep as to be a cleavage in the very world, with Siku lying like a toy at your feet; nor anything to compare with the violent contrasts of Saharan valleys and burnt-out naked depths beneath alpine woodlands rising immediately above the skeleton corrugations of the loess down; and gigantic mountains aspiring immediately again over these, instead of sprawling out in ample magnificence like a wallowing Cleopatra on cushions, as the Ortler and the Bernina

lie out at their length over the cushioned foothills of the Valtelline.

Having precautiously paid respects to Our Lady of Mercy, and conciliated the good-will of the jolly little old buzzle-headed priest in attendance, we set off down from the peak and across the strip of plain, and up in long zigzags towards the slanting alp of verdure behind. First there came a scant scrub of holm oak, and a blazing cliff on which the pearl-bush grows rather small and starved, but all the more lovely, therefore, in her display of moonlit mother-of-pearl.* Occasionally on that face there also glowed blots of bright rose that proved to be pink Peonies, and higher yet the stark crevices of the limestone began to flaunt with the huge rosy trumpets of a dwarf Incarvillea,†, as limp and flimsy and gorgeous in colouring as to be like some Dipladenia from the stove stuck into a cranny for fun, rather than a real wild plant of the northern world, very well able to look after itself against summer and winter in the lower Alpine zone of Northern Asia. It hardly seemed to have a stem at all, and flaunted its great flowers in such increasing splendour from the crannies as we ascended higher that at last one could hardly distinguish them from afar from the Peonies that also shone in the cliff. It was a steep, long climb, and our first shock was in discovering that the emerald sward which from Siku had looked so cool and inviting and typically alpine was in reality a very hot scrub of long, rank, wiry grasses, dense with bracken and all the other plebeian productions of hot Chinese downs. Our second was when we met a peasant descending with a load of brushwood, who warned us angrily not to attempt the

* *Exochorda racemosa Wilsoni.*

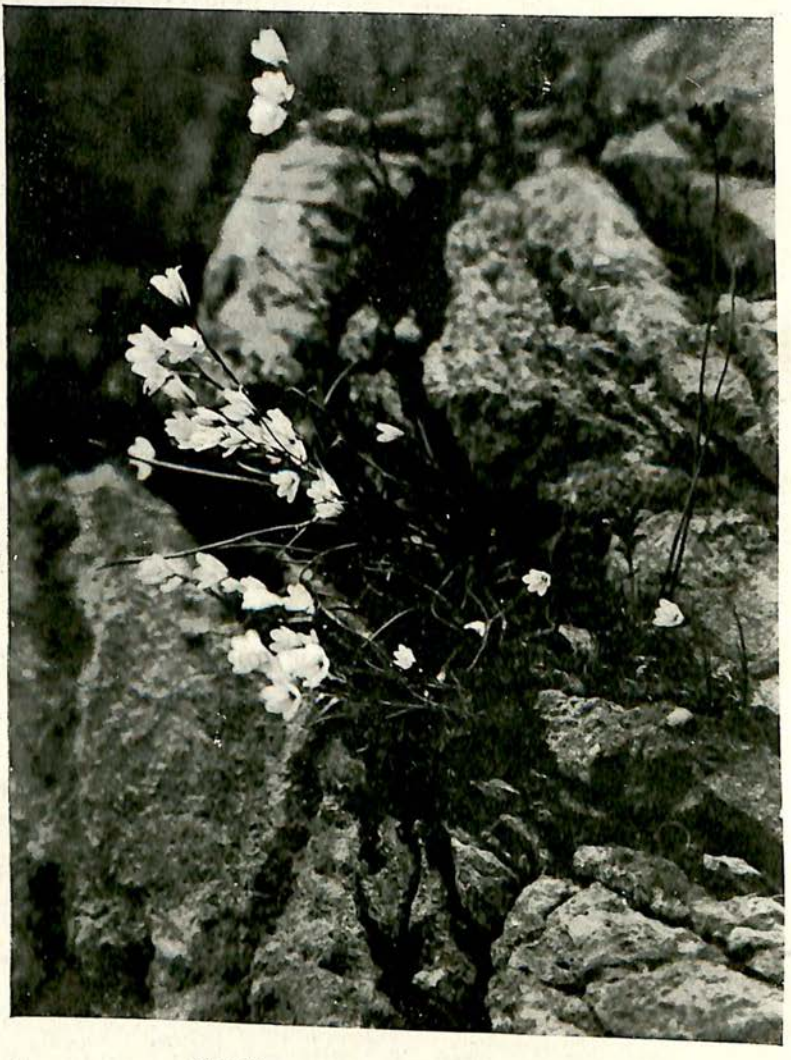
† *I. grandiflora.*

heights, as this was a demon mountain and sacrosanct. However, we brandished over him the authority of the Yamun and continued on our way, hoping that his scruples might not be justified by another thunderstorm such as had avenged the outraged majesty of the Bastion on the cornfields of Chago.

The track continued up along the sunburnt side of the mountain, and in the little folds there peered among the bracken a most exquisite, small, grassy Iris, with fairy-like flowers of lavender, heavily spotted with dark violet velvet on the white centre of their falls, and of an altogether elfin charm;* otherwise, the coarse herbage was not fertile in flowers, though the Peony flaunted yet more and more abundantly around each small outcrop of rock. Finally we turned a corner, and found ourselves at the foot of a high and very steep gully that in the vastness of the hillside had been quite undiscernible from Siku. Up into this we turned, and almost the first thing we came on was a new Primula. But alas! it was clearly only *P. lichiangensis*, or a very close cousin; and after Silvia there was something bold, though innocently bold, about its wide heads of flat, upstaring, pink faces that wavered here and there above the lush leafage in the cooler hollows and crannies of the cliffs. But as we mounted higher, and attained a zone equivalent to that of the Bastion gorge, the vegetation grew much more interesting. The Peonies now stood in dense drifts of rose-scented single roses in the coarse grass, and in a little while the coarse upper scrub of Potentillas began to harbour the last lemony refulgences (at this their lowest extension) of the Lampshade Poppy,† whose fat lumpish stems and habit

* *I. goniocarpa pratensis*, the lowland form.

† The Lampshade Poppy is, of course, *Meconopsis integrifolia*.



THE FAIRY BELL. LLOYDIA ALPINA

do not help to soften the bland vulgarity of the plant's enormous and overfed magnificence.

And in the meantime, to my joy, every step revealed something that we had fondly feared had been left behind for ever in the Bastion gorge. The Rock-nymph Primula and the Fairy Bell were happy in all the cooler crannies of the cliff, and the very grass-tangles themselves were a riot of the golden ground Daphne, while the silver Saxifrage was much finer than before in hoary wads on the cooler cliffs. Higher we went and higher, approaching now to the spikes and pinnacles of alpine coppice that from Siku had looked like insignificant bristlings on the face of the sloping fell, but now revealed themselves as powerful peaks and precipices, with deep, steep grass-gullies ramifying downwards between them. On the shadier aspects of the points and arêtes a large Rhododendron was growing low and stunted, with globes of white blossom that often made a dappled effect when one looked up at the snowballed heights; and on a cliff far up I saw at length a uniform shimmering effect of whiteness that at first I took for some strange vagary of the sunlight playing on a bed of rippling glossy leaves. But when I got nearer I was aware with awe of a wide drift of magnificent fluffy Anemones flopping their heads of big white blossoms unanimously from an impregnable ledge. More appeared higher up, and more and more; every ledge that one could not get at was soon completely occupied by bending mats of this snowy beauty.

And it was an old friend, too, though an old friend transformed and hardly unrecognisable, in what must surely be the most noble of its many avatars. For this is the one alpine plant of general fame and importance in our gardens, which is found in an unbroken chain of

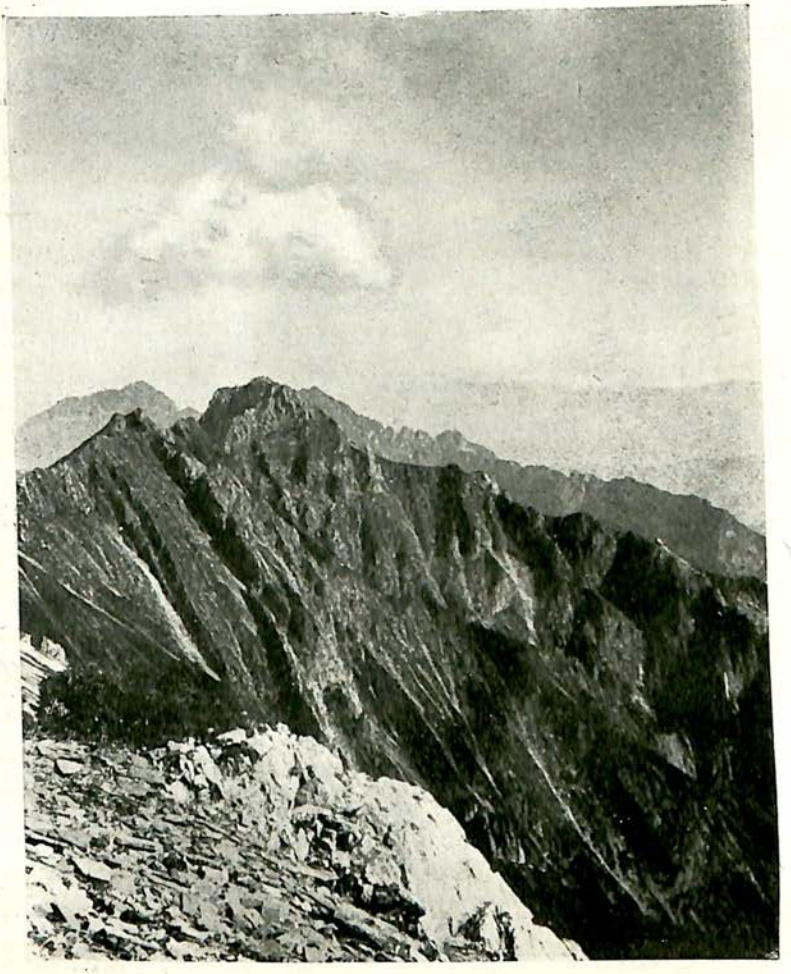
distribution right across the world, from the far west of the Pyrenees to the farthest north-east corner of Tibet, with a Dromio to replace it in the New World, too. It is none other than *A. narcissiflora*, Linnæus, itself, just the same that you may see in sweeps of apple-blossom heads across the high swards of the Cottians below the Combes de Barant, and in many another favoured place of those far, fair hills; but here the Narcissus Anemone has doubled its splendour. Its flowers and foliage and whole development are much larger and ampler than are ever seen in Europe; the blooms are always of the purest white within and without, fewer to the loose cluster, bigger, and often, when alone on their stem (as here quite often happens), almost as big and opulent as those of *A. japonica*. Further, instead of loving open sweeps of turf and the edges of the coppice, as at home, the Narcissus Anemone of these Alps haunts only the most impregnable ledges of the cliffs, and is, indeed, ridiculously hard to get at as a rule, though on the upper ridges of Chagoling I suspect that the Anemone there unfolding in such multitudes on the open moorland was this same true Narcissiflora itself in another form, for once relaxing the austerity of its tastes. It is a glory of the far-eastern Min S'an only, and riots in beauty from nine thousand feet to the actual summits, where, however, it becomes anæmic and poorly; and, instead of growing in wide, dense tangles, occurs only in single starveling specimens in rock and arête-turf indifferently. In the cold northerly ranges of the second season I never saw it, nor even in the main Min S'an to the west below Jo-ni; but on the Thundercrown mass and the Great Ridge it is the glory of the cool cliffs everywhere in the mountain region.

Ravished by these beauties, and enthralled by the ever-unfolding distances behind us, which were now revealing, far away beyond the Satanee range, huge masses of everlasting snow that must obviously be the great Alps above Sung-pan, we came at last with dramatic abruptness to the end of the climb, and found ourselves suddenly on the verge of a deep precipice, with the whole mass of Thundercrown immediately in front, across a vast and tumbled chaos of profound wooded gorges far away beneath our feet; yet seeming so near that, as usual, the whole scale of the scene eluded us, and we thought that we might stroll round among the peaks of the ridge above us, and find ourselves in half an hour or so on the seductive slopes of Thundercrown's own alpine lawn that slopes away from the base of the main precipice, and was still looking sere and brown and pale in winter, promising cool streams and many a precious Primula. Vain intoxication, for the distances are huge, and so are the ups and downs and ghastly rents in the ridge overhead, where what looks like a pillar-box a few hundred yards away turns out to be a Langdale Pike at half a day's distance. Nor was there any way, even had time permitted; for the arête on which we had emerged passed upwards immediately into a wilderness of peaks and precipices where there was no human possibility of passage.

So, as the day was at its height, we lay luxuriant in the grass and scanned the lawns and contours of Thundercrown through our field-glasses, trying to estimate how many sections of Primulas might there be represented by magnificent and brand-new Farreris and Farrerianas (Purdomii being already so illustriously occupied). On the edge of the cool dank precipice we sat and dangled our legs over, and contemplated that

promised land, so near and yet so far, and with its unplumbed intervening gulfs and gorges and ridges looking all so insignificant under the tumbled gigantic imminence of the mountain. Surely some of those coppices might hold the Wood-nymph Primula, seeing that these rocks had already yielded the Rock-nymph? Alas that there was no hope here, on this hotter, drier range, of the Grand-Violet! At that very moment, down beneath my feet, a familiar flare of purple flame shone out on the dark and shelving wall of that moist cool cliff. Slithering from tuffet to tuffet of the dank little matted willows and Rhododendrons I went down that wall hand over hand like any ape in the ardour of my certainty, and there was even the Grand-Violet herself as happy and blazingly imperial on these damp ledges of rich and clammy loam as in the sombre fastnesses of the Bastion gorge.

This crowned the day, indeed; and I will not dwell on the comparative bathos of Isopyrum's skim-milky white Anemones, with rich eyes of gold and orange, that were just beginning to twinkle on their sea-grey tuffets of fern-like foliage in the starkest crevices of the cliffs. For now it was time to return; the afternoon had passed into heavy cloud, and with hearty prayers against thunder and, especially, hail, we began to descend. No one who has not learned the uncertainties of the Tibetan temperament and the superstitions of the Chinese can realise what it is to watch the coming and passing of thunder-clouds with a feeling of acute personal interest in their proceedings. However, it was evident that, whatever the weather might be going to do, we were not blamed for it by the black little shock-headed caretaker of the Pink Temple, who, seeing us from his high pinnacle returning from the mountain,



On the Great Ridge high above the Pink Temple Peak, looking Eastwards into China

sent us down bowls of chocolate-coloured tea, entreating us to be refreshed. This was reassuring, and so was the fact that, though dense levels of darkness now covered all the heavens, and a sheet of rain and storm was clearly advancing, it was not coming from the outraged peak up behind us, but sweeping westwards out of China up the valley of the Blackwater.

Even so, despite menaces and false starts and the most ominous appearances, the storm could not make up its mind to any straightforward or disastrous course, but played peep-bo along the ridges and among the heights, thundering and lightening a good deal, but committing itself only to a kind stimulating rain. So we ran down the steeps of the loess upon Siku, and got into the town without being either wetted or slaughtered. Nor did general agitation appear to have been aroused by our expedition; nor by the obvious though not very violent disfavour it had aroused in the spirits of the air. Not, indeed, that a Chinese town, however remote and wild, would normally be likely to break into excess on such an excuse; but in times so upset, and with the central authority so powerless, and all control gone to the winds, it was by no means so certain that some popular disapproval of weather-brewers might not make itself felt within the infiltrating sphere of Tibetan superstitions. With gratitude, therefore, did we hail the mitigation of the mountain's wrath, and rejoice when it even softened to a pleasant steady deluge that was what everybody wanted, and so, by continuing for a night and a day, raised us to the position of public benefactors, as having procured it.

But fresh storms, and of less supernatural nature, were brooding round Siku in the backwash of the Wolf, and it was well that the little town was still

alert and well furbished in defence from the late scare. The March was on the move; four Tibetan spies were discovered inside the walls, and only one of them was caught and subjected to the fatherly interrogations of Great Lord Jang, whose views on government never allowed him to take any drastic steps, and who therefore failed to elicit any information. Accordingly the captive very soon found a way to influence the Yamun underlings into conniving at his escape. However, his character was not left long in doubt, for within twenty-four hours Siku was once more plunged into a passion of excitement by sure news that Tibet was moving upon them from the west, with a view to perpetrating the annual amicable foray on a specially grand and ferocious scale, in view of the present powerlessness of China. Immediately the gates were shut, and the walls manned with every available male, while the streets were full of agitated women; the tattered baker's dozen of scoundrels who composed the garrison ran frantically up and down with screeches of trumpets and other alarms and excursions, over which Mr. Pung presided with a wried little smile of contemptuous pity, seeing them making so vain a show of refurbishing their ridiculous muskets and the pair of mud-embedded mortars on the wall that might last have been fired for the death of Queen Elizabeth. Their inadequacy, however, did not so greatly matter, he remarked, as the Chinese soldier is never at any pains to aim his gun, no matter how modern and accurate, nourishing a firm conviction that the marksman's only part is to hold the weapon, while the indwelling spirit of the gun does all the rest, and insures each bullet finding its appointed billet. No wonder the little town had scant confidence in its garrison, or in that garrison's commander, sunk

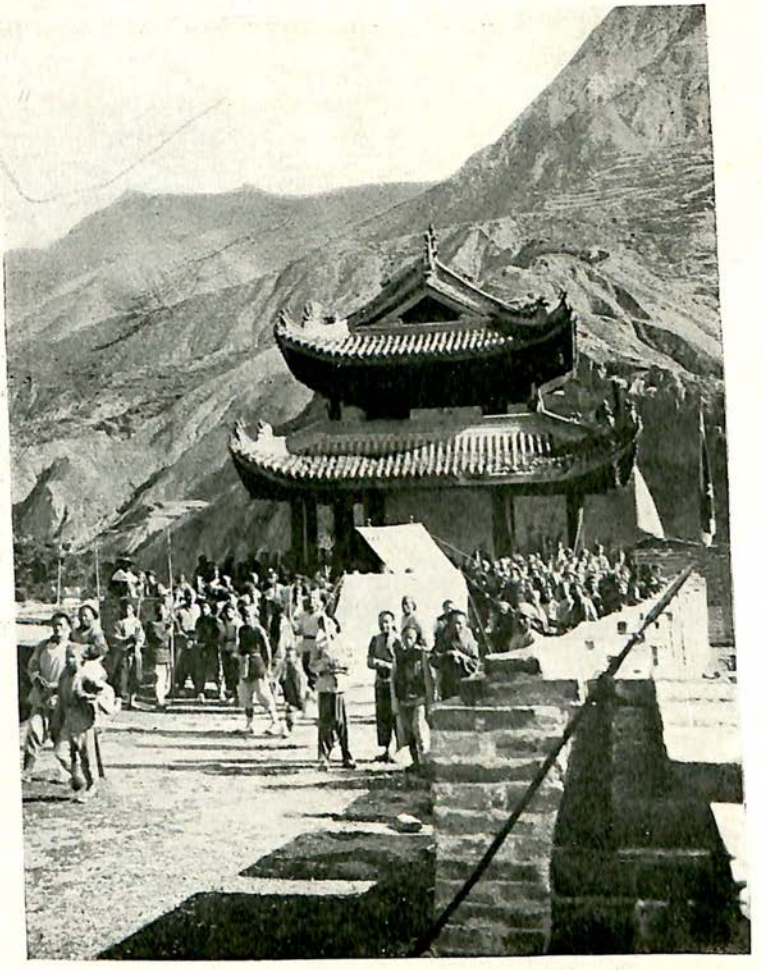
in a humorous and despairing apathy. Accordingly the thoughts of the populace turned in our direction, and a deputation of leading townspeople was despatched to entreat our aid, while Great Lord Jang came up through the Yamun in full state to confer with Great Man Pung next door on the subject.

A dingy and wall-eyed person—though no doubt a man of property—was the spokesman, and the proceedings were conducted with all ceremonious observance and handing of cups of tea. But before the tortuous conversation could allow itself to come twining within sight of its object it was interrupted by both the Great Men, attended by their trains. The Lord Jang, magnificent and elephantine beneath his flat-brimmed bowler hat of black moiré, lost no time in coming to the point, and entreated us to lend our countenance to the defence of the city. We had already, indeed, sent up our arms and tents and ammunition on to the wall to inspire confidence, but now it was a case of our own immediate presence being required. Accordingly a pompous procession was promptly formed, and down through the streets we defiled to the western gate, escorted by both the Great Men and all their retainers, and a disorderly bodyguard marching in an avenue on either side, in their unaltered scarlet and yellow blouses of the Imperial régime, and armed with every sort of theatrical and medieval halberd hung about with crimson tassels to keep away the ubiquitous devils of Chinese imagination. Up on to the wall at the western gate this awe-inspiring demonstration flowed, where we found the population densely gathered along the battlements and round the gate-tower, eagerly prospecting the stony path that goes westward, and is clearly visible at intervals for three or four miles along

the flanks and over the high shoulders of the towering hills that here shut in the Blackwater. Amid enthusiastic crowds the tents were unfurled and pitched, and all our weapons and cartridges displayed, to the edification and encouragement not only of the multitude, but of the two Governors themselves.

The prowess and powers of the rifle, indeed, soon became a legend, and swelled at last to such proportions that in time all the March believed that Siku was mysteriously armed with howitzers and maxims. Meanwhile the long hours passed; we anxiously scanned the steep sky-lines and khaki crumples of the fell. Now and then, amid a hum of excitement, a head would become visible on some high horizon, linger for a few moments, and disappear again—evidently a spy. Then there was much agitation over a knot of six Isabella-coloured figures who were discovered motionless on a distant pinnacle; these, too, were clearly spies, unless they might be peasants from one of the imperilled little villages on the loess shelf so far above, come down to inform themselves as to the fate of the capital. The population was in an incessant buzz of excitement; all the time-honoured triangular banners were flapping from the walls, and in the machicolations of the battlements the soldiers knelt here and there over the long rusty barrels of their guns, where members of the city manhood were not already posted over the heaps of stones amassed all along. As for Great Man Pung, in happy indifference, he slept an opium dream, meanwhile, in comfort on the Kang of the gate-tower's ground-floor room.

In such varied alarms and suspense the day proceeded, and every moment increased the excitement of the town and the wildness of the rumours that prevailed



THE DEFENCE OF SIKU

as to the fate of the villages up above, reported harried and burned. But still nothing was visible anywhere over the wild and precipitous distances of the west, from which alone any efficient force could have advanced against Siku. The citizens beguiled time with our field-glasses, prospecting eagerly through the wrong end, or holding the right one so far from their eyes that they could see nothing, and exclaimed incessantly on the marvels of foreign science in order to pretend they did. Finally, they got to such a pitch that harmless boulders on the hill were turned into Tibetan hordes, and it was positively a relief when, towards the beginning of dusk, the whole Tibetan army was discerned advancing in force against Siku from the west. Doing or dying became instantly the order of the day; screams and rushings about made general pandemonium. But the Tibetan army turned out to consist of a respectable elderly Chinese person of quality, coming into the city for refuge on her mule, with an attendant at each stirrup, and a boy with a bundle.

Night came down; under a serene sky of stars the watch-fires flickered and shone all round the line of battlements in an unbroken chain of sparks, girdling the city. We took our places at the tents amid the unexampled enthusiasm of the populace, now huddled in knots along beside the fires. The scene might have been laid in Troy two thousand years ago. One had, indeed, the full feeling of having been carried back at a jump into the Middle Ages, or realising what it must have been to live on the English March in some small burg perpetually at the mercy of Scottish raiders. Great Man Pung, indeed, blasé with all this absurd medievalism, went cynically home to bed—a step that by no means raised his popularity. Great Lord Jang,

on the contrary, played his characteristic and proper part, continually going the round of the walls with his underlings, addressing fatherly words of cheer to each little group at the watch-fires as he passed. In this task, on which Purdom accompanied him, he was further assisted by the Mee, whose Yamun blood could never resist the appeal of any Yamun proceeding (nor, indeed, any opportunity of thrusting himself forward), and now quacked and clattered officiously on the Great Lord's track with all the typical zeal of a Yamun underling to anticipate and explain his lord's remarks to hearers who understand them perfectly well already. As for me, I stayed in my post on the wall by the western gate, and there remained through all the multitudinous turmoil of that agitated night, with the big town gong incessantly uttering its splendid booming note to an undercurrent of smaller ones, while trumpets wailed across the drone of drums, and clackers pitilessly clacked with a noise like nails being hammered into a packing-case above an obbligato of corncrakes. Thus were the demons of sleep effectually dispelled at need, for the favourite hour of Tibetan attacks is always in the last dark before the dawn.

When the day came we found that our precautions and our presence had proved effectual; gunshots were heard far up from the loess shelf, and then on the sky-line appeared what looked like the antennæ of some forty gigantic beetles, which turned out to be the projecting prongs of the Tibetan arquebuses as their wearers peered over the horizon of the hill. These warriors were a scout-party from the main body that had just been harrying the villages up behind. They waited long, and narrowly inspected the city from their height; but its resolute appearance daunted them, or they must

have heard of the supernatural reinforcements it had received. In any case, after a prolonged pause they retired again from view, and insensibly the tension in the town relaxed, possibly because this was also a festal day. Cards were generally sent and exchanged, and Great Lord Jang gratified us with a present of pork and rice and hens. The evening, however, brought a recrudescence of excitement; for two undoubted villains, whether spies of Tibetans or Wolves it made no matter, had been captured in the street during the afternoon.

And hardly had this emotion been survived than there appeared on the public wall a proclamation openly denouncing Great Man Pung for a slacker and a shirker and a wencher and a sot. All the town hummed; the Great Man himself whizzed in and out of the Yamun in a red blanket, as sick-looking as a bilious monkey. The scandal did, indeed, so prick him that he was actually stirred into sending out a band of scouts; but as they merely slept outside the gate all night, and reentered in the morning with loud fanfaronades, they cannot be said to have accomplished any high end. And our own case was now much worse than ever, for every hope of the mountains was blasted for some time to come. It had been bad enough before, but the scare of the Wolf had been subsiding, and had never, anyhow, been so local and permanent. But after this new scare nobody could tell what Tibetan bands and isolated raiders might not be lurking in the fastnesses of Thundercrown overhead; and Thundercrown, accordingly, was the very last direction in which the harassed Mandarins could contemplate allowing the foreigner to go, for fear of "incidents." Thus "some day perhaps," was the timeless date on which we seemed doomed to nourish cheerfulness for any amount of time to come. In this

insurgence of the March there was no earthly telling when things would so far have settled down as to allow us up into the mountain without injustice to the kind and friendly Mandarins. Thus stood our sad state on the 30th of May, two days after the invasion; and so it bode fair still to stand, so far as we could see, till the 30th of June, or July, or August, or September.

CHAPTER XII

SIKU: CHUNG WAI-TO

But hardly had we fairly settled our souls to this unsatisfactory fate than the whole prospect miraculously changed. For within three days of the Tibetan retirement we woke to find the town once more all of a stir, news having come of a Szechuanese regiment now actually advancing to the relief of Siku and the condign repression of the March. Even on the Great Men Jang and Pung these tidings fell like a bolt from the blue, and they had to stir their stumps in unusual activity, bustling around to arrange provender and accommodation for these unexpected visitors. Poor Lord Jang had a sad and harried look, and Great Man Pung went restlessly on his rounds, escorted by long dry trumpetings exactly like the rending of trousers. The town was in a new emotion; and now the battlements were crowded with expectant women. From this point of vantage we also watched the entry of the troops. They arrived about midday in successive detachments, welcomed by Jang and Pung seated in state in a little arboured courtyard beside the road outside the south gate, where each officer was bowed in and ceremoniously entreated to tea. It was no wonder that the townspeople were almost wild with wonder and dread at the sight of such monsters as these—trim bodies of soldiers, slender and trig, jerkined and breeched in

khaki, moving with well-drilled swing, and armed with modern rifles clearly capable of going off. They had the strangest anachronistic effect as they tramped along the street of that prehistoric little place, and their destination appeared as vague as their presence seemed preposterous. Where were they going? What were they really meaning to do? Would they save the town, or would they seize the chance of plundering it?

In the meantime the situation bristled with difficulties and points of peril, neither the citizens nor the troops being able to understand each other. Everybody was confounded at the sight of these uniformed figures from another world, and at sight of the coinage they carried—unheard-of silver disks called dollars, and rectangular pieces of paper that they mendaciously made out were money, and produced for payment in place of the immemorial perforated pence which had been the town's one currency since the days of Han and Tang. The citizens, however much afraid of the forces, could not but protest against such obvious frauds. And thus difficulty was added to difficulty, and poor stout old Lord Jang fell visibly away with anxiety, as he paddled hither and thither through the town trying to solve the problem of peaceably providing for some three hundred soldiers in a place so poor that two foreign guests had already almost bankrupted it in flour and eggs and hens. However, the troops, despite the gloomiest forebodings, remained perfectly orderly and well-behaved. Their chiefs came up to call, and then went on to dine with Great Man Pung, the Governor himself being also a guest. Hilarity reigned, and when at last Great Lord Jang took his leave it was in a welter of vinously ceremonious courtesy, his mountainous mass looming high above the crowd of menials who

supported his profuse and solemn bows, while at every inclination the long black fringe flopped earthwards beneath the broad brim of the bowler.

The Colonel, however, though full of amiability to us and the Governors, was typically secret as to his plans, and the full purpose of Mr. Pung's banquet was only evident when he came afterwards to tell us with glee of what he had wheedled out of his replete guest. It seemed that the troops, really intended to take the Wolf in the rear, were officially destined to the pacification of the March, seeing that Lanchow for the moment was helpless, and forced to invoke the help of Szechuan. However, matters now seemed so serious up north that what the army was going to do had come quite in doubt.

It was now definitely said that the Mahomedan forces of Kansu, guarding the approaches to the capital over Monk Mountain and Lotus Mountain, had actually joined hands with the Wolves—news which, if true, could mean nothing short of the loss of Kansu and capital and all, in face of which it would be quite useless for any Chinese troops to go any farther against odds so hopeless. So that the Szechuanese battalion was only tentatively advancing, under cover of emissaries sent ahead to Min-jô, to discover what the real state of affairs might be. If it proved that the Mahomedans and the Wolves had indeed coalesced, the new-comers would immediately retire again southwards to Cheng-tu to hold their own province. As for the two Great Men, they did not dissemble their own decision, in such circumstances, to bolt as promptly and unobtrusively as possible, leaving Siku to shift for itself. What we were to do was the point that chiefly occupied my own mind. There seemed, for the moment, no possible

answer except that one must wait on events, and believe nothing until compelled, on pain of risking one's cheerfulness in such a chaos of uncertainties.

But I do not think that Mr. Pung triumphed so completely over the Colonel's prudence as he flattered himself, for on the morrow all the forces marched immediately away westwards into Tibet, with a brace of mountain-guns and every look of going to do business. We seized this opportunity to accompany them outside the city, and then diverged up to the right for a flying preliminary inspection of the flanks of Thundercrown and the best ways of getting to the summit. We found an easy hunter's track, and enjoyed a very successful day, diversified by the misbehaviour of the Mee, who, being charged to accompany us with the indispensable rifle, instead of doing so, placidly relinquished the ascent and went to sleep instead under a rock about half-way up; so that, had Tibetans occurred to us in the topmost gullies, we should have been helpless. When aroused and "spoke to plain," he engagingly replied that he had feared it would be cold on the mountain. Whereupon the speaking became a good deal plainer, being handed over to the Mafu's eloquence, and after his stern and level-toned allocution "a more fell-away little person you couldn't 'ardly see" than the Mee, kneeling humbly on the floor and beating his forehead on the earth before each of us in succession. In the end, what with these distractions and the length of the way, it had long been black night before we got back to Siku, and found the Mandarins in high agitation about our probable fate, and emissaries timidly coming in search of us along the safer places where it was least likely they would find anybody. It was still obviously held impossible for us to be trusted out with our tents

on the mountain, though my inexperienced simplicity found it difficult to see how or why some seven hundred marauding Tibetans should fly for refuge to the ice-bound upper gullies of a mountain so inhospitable and vast and convoluted. Anyhow, Mr. Pung was more than ever insistent on the inadvisability of going even up into the gorges for some days to come.

Probably his zeal had been reinspired by a late letter from Great Lord Jo of Kiai-jô, warning him that all the roads of South Kansu were now impassable, and that a special lookout was to be kept for two foreigners who were reported to have slipped away westward over the Border before the advance of the Wolf. In any case, he had ground for his anxiety, as this military expedition was bound to cause a general upheaval among the Tibetans, whose nearest village had just been burned by the troops, with five lives lost. The local excitement was now the keener, for the rumours from the north grew much more reassuring. It seemed as if the official strategy were being fully justified, with the Mahomedans standing stanch after all (and in despite of recent tales), and the southern troops advancing, so that the Wolves, penned up at the feet of Monk Mountain and Lotus Mountain, with their escape barred into the wild country of Labrang, and their ammunition rapidly running out, appeared now to be in a poor way, with every prospect of paying due penalties for the sack of Min-jô and Tao-jô, the full tale of which horrors was just beginning to pervade the countryside like a miasma.

Meanwhile the punitive expedition continued shooting and burning its way into the rebellious March, and every morning brought tales of victory and retribution. Nobody was at all pleased about it, and Great Lord

Jang grew to look flabbier and older every day with anxiety and dismal forebodings, for these drastic methods were a complete violation of the traditional policy at Siku. Siku had no malice whatever against the marauding Tibetans. The custom of ages prescribed a course of mutual and perfectly amiable brigandage, each party robbing the other discreetly, and nobody conceiving bad blood against anyone else. But now, if troops were to go harrying about and really killing and punishing, a very much darker state of things would be introduced. Killing begets killing. In a little while these well-armed troops would be removed, and then what vengeance would not the dour and infuriated Tibetans wreak upon the helpless Sikuese? A state of embittered blood-feud would now replace the pleasant tolerance that had gone before. Lord Jang felt all this, and quaked as he sat. Very soon the troops would be gone, and there would he be left alone to bear the fury of the hornets' nest that they had aroused.

And roused it was, all down the Border. Even the monks of Chago took to quaking in their turn, for evidently Yuan Shih Kai had sent up an army to avenge the insult offered to the foreign lords and to the majesty of China in Satanee. At last a monk came slinking over the hills and secretly into Siku to ascertain what truth there might be in these reports. Fortunately he happened on the honey-dealer, who, besides being very friendly to the foreign lords (who had bought up all his honey), was also himself a Mahomedan, and therefore overjoyed to have the chance of upsetting a monk. "For a week," he impressively replied, "you need not so very greatly fear; but after that, Heaven help you. . . ." He waved his arms to indicate vague and awful catastrophes. The monk, with no more words said,

gathered up his purple skirts and precipitately fled from the place.

Alarms and excursions continued, with tales of harryings and burnings in the west. One night there was a loud clamouring of screams and blows in Mr. Pung's yard, and, entering, we came upon a Rembrandtesque picture of the Great Man dancing vigorously with the wrath that is part of the Chinese ruler's official make-up; while before him, held down along the floor, a stalwart figure was undergoing a spanking to an obbligato of dismal squalls, which are also part of the etiquette of the occasion. For some reason, in Siku, the military Governor, ranking lower than the civil, has no power of putting the trousers down; and Great Lord Jang himself was of far too kindly and soft a nature for any hopes in that direction. Accordingly Mr. Pung had to deal with this malefactor on his own account and as best he could, capering with screeches beneath his fir-bough arbour in the vacillating yellow light of the lanterns, which made the black and white dapplings of the moonlight in the little courtyard seem more ghastly than ever. Smart, swift, and light the strokes fell in a steady rain; howls went up to Heaven. Etiquette, I say, prescribes these howls, even before the punishment begins. It would show a lamentable lack of proper feeling and good manners in a criminal if he should submit to being smacked in a stoic silence, for this would be held to show an insolent contempt for the powers of justice, who would accordingly proceed to her very utmost efforts to emphasise them.

But, though yells are a matter of form and course, there may easily come a time when they spring unbidden, for in the heavier beatings there is ample occasion for them. In the full ceremonial the culprit is held

prone, and his trousers pulled down; two executioners, kneeling one on each side, wield the fifteen-inch shingle of flat wood in a succession of small, unforced taps, administered in quick flights of so many alternately, while a clerk calls out the tale of each batch. Their effect is not made by their individual force, but by number and multiplicity; when the strokes are counted by thousands, the effect is deep disabling gangrenes over the whole back of the upper leg from just below the buttock to just above the knee. In the severest cases death is as much the anticipated result as with the knout. There is a regular scale of four degrees, four regions for "the boards," and habitual criminals stand revealed on a minute's inspection by their possession or lack of the four parallel couples of scarred stretches that stand for a long and full experience of justice.

Not that she often gets her full tale, for amid his wailings the victim is also yelling bribes to his doomsmen, and when the offer is sufficient the clerk's stentorian shout omits one hundred, and slides straight on into the next after it, and so forth. In this case, however, though the yells might have satisfied the soul of Ezzelino, and Great Man Pung's leaping ecstasies and raucous screeches of rage have roused the envy of the Emperor Valentinian, the actual punishment was more a matter of cry than wool—though a less histrionic note indeed came into the culprit's squalls when at intervals, in the culmination of his furies, Mr. Pung would himself seize a board and bring it down in no short official tap, but with a good hearty swipe that resounded again and again across the seat of the culprit's breeches, until the pavid assistants, pleading pity, arrested his arm tenderly; in accordance, again, with invariable Chinese custom when genuine passion

is revealed. Thus the patient, despite the protection of his garments, did not wholly escape his due. He proved to be a guide to the forces who had stolen silver from some farms on the way, and bolted back to the city with his booty, where he had been lying concealed for the last few days. It was the more Mr. Pung's point to make him a contrasting example, in that the incorrigible kindliness of old Lord Jang had made him connive at or contrive the escape of the two spies captured a few days earlier.

The movements of the troops meanwhile continued. It was curious to find how rigidly, even up here, still obtained the ancient separatist spirit of Chinese officialdom; for while justice and other large matters are debated on the open stage of the Yamun-court in the presence of hundreds of attentive hearers, who come and go as they please, and spread the tale in every detail through all the channels of the town-talk, when it comes to the decisions of the higher departments, these are taken separately, and kept rigidly secret from all the others, who are thus left in the dark where they might reasonably be collaborating. Thus, while these Szechuanese troops and their commander were coming and going about Siku, and the commander for ever in and out of Great Man Pung's apartments, arranging for convoys and so forth, the military Governor of the town himself was allowed to know no more of the present military plans than the merest coolie in his Yamun. Even our own part was more prominent.

For now began to return the visible proofs of glorious war, in the form of the Chinese wounded. Their number was not grievous, nor their wounds often severe. Our services were accepted with much gratitude, and even entreated specially on behalf of a smart young officer

who, in reconnoitring over a hill upon a monastery beneath, had, in the very moment of turning to call up his troops, been caught by a bullet just in the heel, that had passed straight in behind and lodged firmly in the middle of the sole under the arch of the instep. It was a maddening case—a wound so trifling, yet so painful, and daily becoming more and more dangerous in the summer heat, with no means of dislodging the bullet and nothing to be done (in the absence of all anæsthetics) except to keep the opening of it as clean as possible. The patient went steadily from bad to worse, accordingly, and under the daily probings that we cautiously tried, his cries grew more and more irrepressible while the bullet remained no less immovable. Some local anodyne was produced, and proved of no more use than so much water. The pain and fever increased from hour to hour, and in the certainty of blood-poisoning there seemed only one end to be looked for—an end the more cruel in that its cause was so trivial and had so nearly been escaped altogether. However, we urged the commander to send down the Blackwater three days' journey to Kiai-jô, on the possibility that the Szechuanese there now in occupation might perhaps have some chloroform.

It was the one chance. We counted the hours till the answer should come, hoping that it might not be too late. Already the whole foot and all the leg up to the knee was a huge, shapeless mass of dull violet. There seemed no hope, and the patient was passing towards his later stages, when at length half a bottle of chloroform did actually appear. There was not a moment to lose. The operation was arranged for early morning, and I anxiously rehearsed my duties as anæsthetist, flying for comfort to the little medical brochure

that accompanies Burroughs and Wellcome's invaluable boxes of drugs. But here I found scant help for my ignorance. This was the instructive sentence that alone met my eye: "Except when a doctor is present, an anæsthetic must never be administered. It frequently happens, however, that in remote and isolated places the doctor may require the assistance of some non-professional friend. In such circumstances the layman must obey exactly the directions given by the doctor." Could any advice be sounder or more illuminating—except for its failure to recognise that some places may actually be so remote and isolated as not even to have a tame surgeon on the spot? What a very high standard of civilisation does this not presuppose in the darkness of Africa, and those other tropical lands for which one would judge these boxes and books to be almost exclusively compiled, if one may reason from their complete blankness about any circumstances that might arise in Asia. However, there was no help for it: we must make the best of things.

So we donned butcher-blue gowns, and swabbed tables, and prepared basins of warm condied water, and set the razors and needles to stew, and did all the things we could think of, in fact, to make ourselves feel real workmen in the healing art. And in the grey morning the patient, convulsively retching with terror, was borne up by his orderlies and laid upon the table. The agitation was general and indescribable; the little uppermost yard of the Yamun was filled with a dense and quivering crowd. Out of what strange perversity of misunderstanding the European has plucked the notion that the Chinese are a wooden and unsensitive race I have never been able to understand. Probably it arises from the fact that the Chinese are, undoubtedly,

philosophic and patient and acquiescent. But they are thus, not from any natural apathy, but from its exact reverse. The West is so uncultured that it cannot recognise the reality in any emotion that does not find some violent vent; in point of fact, the philosophic calm that the Chinese deliberately cultivate is their necessary armour to protect their excessive susceptibility to emotion. No race in the world is probably more swept with passions, in so devastating a way that the physical frame itself is often left a wreck. The Chinese would be for ever the victims of their nerves, had they not for four thousand years pursued reason and self-control with self-protective enthusiasm. And the result of a moral training that we cannot understand is an emotional attitude of mind that we are even less able to understand—an apparently lethargic stoicism which blinds us to the underlying tremulous excitability of the nerves which that wooden manner has been expressly devised to safeguard.

How imperfectly it does so, even in the northern races of China (in the southern it does not exist, and the Cantonese is as mobile as a Gaul), I was soon to have proof. The operation began; the patient lay extended, the cook holding his head, while I administered drops of chloroform out of a tabloid bottle with the screw lid pierced, upon the mask we had improvised out of wire and the wreckage of a shirt. Through a varied series of grunts and gurgles and snores the patient sank into oblivion. I was conscious of the cook already growing green with terror at my elbow, and the attendant crowd half hysterical in suppressed excitement at these preliminary marvels. And then Purdom, at the other end of the table, began to wield the razor. Spouting cascades of foul black blood im-

mediately jetted forth and deluged everything, and the crowd immediately scattered like a flight of hens from a hawk, running into every corner of the Yamun to be sick, or worse. As for the cook, he tottered and rocked as he stood, and the head went rolling from side to side, and I pursuing it with drops of chloroform that went "Clop, clop," all over the place in the agitation of the moment. Still the probings and pokings proceeded at the other end of the table. I kept my eyes as closely as possible to my own job, and cursed the cook in stimulating whispers, and counted the seconds that seemed like hours. Now and then the patient would float into the upper layer of unconsciousness, and the most ghastly snorings would ensue, to be instantly quenched by a more frenzied shower of drops. And then suddenly, from across the prone figure, Purdom looked up at me with a pale set face—he couldn't find the bullet. The situation really grew too tense. I eyed him appalled, and urged him for the mercy of Heaven to hurry up anyhow, and be done with it, and swab out the wound, and bind it up and hope for the best.

It was a grim moment, for without a bullet to show for our trouble, how were we to persuade the populace that all these horrific mysteries had not been a vain show-off? However, the foot was duly enveloped in in a loose bale of wool, and the patient carried out on to the dais of justice to come back to life; while in the little yard the crowd once more returned, timidly, to inspect the red wreckage and mess, and make their interminable inquiries about the operation. At this point Purdom suddenly solved the mystery of the vanishing bullet from one of the basins of blood, with an appositeness that made me for a moment as incredulous as if he had found the Holy Lance. In that one wild

instant I quite believed he had merely picked up a handful of gravelly mud from the yard. But no, that bullet had been, in fact, a conglomerate mass of pebble and grit and mud and all uncleanness, such as so frequently serves the darker purposes of lead in Tibet. In the upheavals of the operation it had, of course, disintegrated, and had burst out into the basin with the first flow of that pent-up corrupted gore. So all was well, and the patient proceeded immediately to make so calm a recovery that in a few days more he was on his way down to convalesce at Cheng-tu, borne in a sedan-chair and suitably attended. We received much glory and gratitude, a little damped a few days later by news that three stages down the road our client had, after all, had the ungraciousness to die. However, when we had sufficiently lamented over this we learned that our grief had been in vain, and that our patient was, in point of fact, in the best of health and spirits, having quite successfully achieved Cheng-tu, where he was undergoing treatment for the plantar bones of the foot, which had been split beyond our healing by the bullet.

These diversions helped to pad the time, and in the meantime this service so wrought upon the Mandarins that at last they yielded us their permission to go up and camp on Thundercrown in a few days more, the troops being now all moving back out of Tibet, with news of many killed and the country completely pacified. In the interval we occupied ourselves in the Great Gorges behind Siku. Up the long and imperceptible ascent of the shingle delta you proceed to where the huge precipice falls from the Pink Temple and, in opposition to another of wildly crumpled, convoluted strata, forms the definite gate of the gorges. Wild tremendous cliffs ascend on either hand. Their ledges

wave with Cotoneaster and the gracious white-starred boughs of *Bauhinia Faberi;* amid the scrub start the golden sparks of day lilies, and the fiery sealing-wax scarlet of the Slender-leaved Lily's Turk's caps on the sunnier faces. But in a little you come to a divergence, and linger in doubt which way to take. To right and left gigantic ravines tear their way down through the flanks of the mountain-masses, so vast and coiling that from their mouth you can discern nothing of their course or possibilities. The cropped hot lawns where the two dead streams meet and take their way to Siku is terraced in levels of poor stony pasture, chiefly composed of the big-flowered, branching heads of *Aster oreophilus*, floating in long flat drifts of palest grey lavender over the sea-blue ramifications of its small rosettes through the grass, and suggesting how very beautiful it might look in warm stony levels of the garden at home in conjunctions with the fulminant orange of the Iceland poppy.*

On our first exploration we ascended the left-hand gorge. The beginning of its ascent is very arduous and steep, climb over climb, with the mountain-sides on either hand gradually unfolding to you their vastness and the titanic scale of the picture. There is water here, water flowing clear as diamond in a little beck-bed of creamy shingles. But the Min S'an at this latter end gives away the secret of this whole dying range. For all these gorges, and the yet profounder, wilder gullies that eviscerate so deeply the lower loins of Thunder-crown, are all but conduits of long-vanished waters, now overgrown with forest and coppice and curtains of moss and Anemone. The Great Ridge is like a knife-edge far above. The waters of heaven fall there every

* But *A. oreophilus* proves so far too impatient of our wet winters, in the fat corroding soil of the garden-plot.

day, and in former times they occupied these beds and filled them, and gave the whole region an equal share in their benefits. But gradually they tore their way deeper and deeper down into the flesh of the hills, and the treacherous limestone betrayed them, as it always does, and they began diving out of sight with such effect that now, along the whole tail-end of the Min S'an from Thundercrown eastward, there is no more superficial water at all on the heights after June and the melting of the snows, nor any springs in the Gorges. Here and there the deep combes have their clear tricklings and their little becks, but they come and go, emerge and disappear again uncannily, playing Arethusa in the long darkness of the chines; and down below in the debouchure of the gorges, where once two goodly torrents met and made the delta above Siku, there is now but a huge expanse of partially reclaimed shingle (except when the Spring of Ninety-nine Years breaks out at the foot of the Pink Temple's precipice, in the precinct of a Pink Temple of its own, built as a proper shrine for an eruption so periodical and miraculous). And then you come to Siku, and there all the swallowed waters suddenly leap joyously to life again in innumerable rills and fountains as clear as beryl beneath the dappled lacy loveliness of the willow groves; while up on the Alps above their ancient natural beds are bare and empty for evermore, deep gullies of dry white boulders like desiccated bones of the mountain.

The left-hand gorge (of which we were vaguely told that it offered a pedestrian pass over to the north) climbs steep and far into the side of the Ridge until you reach a tiny "plan," all one lush and tangled unpruned shrubbery of Rosa and Spiræa and Deutzia and honeysuckle, full of orange-yellow Day-Lilies and Rodgersia

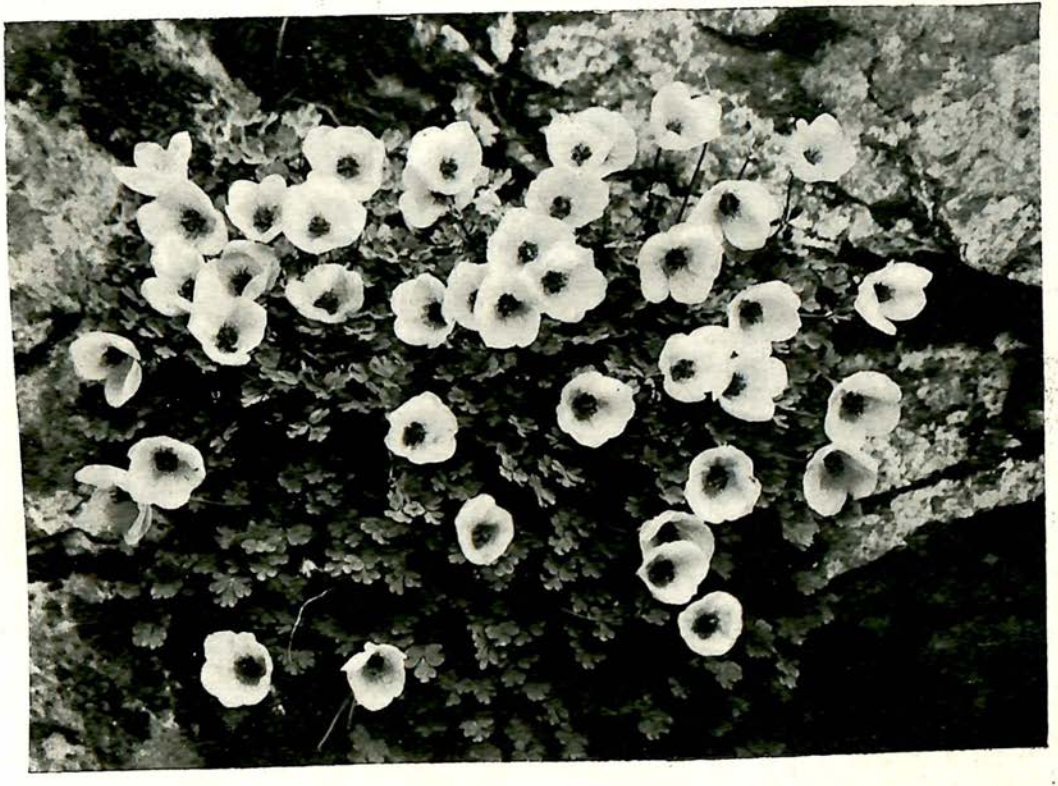
in creamy, lavish plumes waving in tier on tier of foam above its metallic huge foliage like exaggerated horse-chestnut leaves. Here there is a derelict little pink Miao, forlorn and charming amid the greenery; and from this sheltered hollow in the heart of the gigantic cliffs on all sides you look far, far up to where, from her lonely pinnacle, the original pink Miao looks down on her humble cousin in the hollow under her feet. Soon after this the gorge divides. On the one hand is an abortive ravine, with a very lovely, though intermittent, series of cascades down over mossy cirques of cliff embedded in the emerald plumery of the little bamboo. The other way leads arduously, and it seems interminably, up and up in a deep stream-bed of boulders where the Rock-nymph Primula glints from the mossy cliffs amid masses of the silver Saxifrage; and soon you come to yet higher, wilder faces of precipice, where the reappearance of the Grand-Violet, more magnificent than ever on the cold damp ledges, takes away all your attention from the sea-grey, ferny tuffets of the Isopyrum, whose beautiful pale Anemones on their thread-fine stems still leave you wondering why the plant evoked such lyrical enthusiasm from previous collectors; until next season shall bring you to the Da Tung alps, and reveal to you the true *Isopyrum grandiflorum* (if so indeed it be) in true character as the most unbearably beautiful of all rock-plants, making almost a mere mock of *Daphne petræa* and Woollyhair the Dwarf himself.

Steeply the little woodcutters' track now mounts on the coppiced hillside, where tall Lady's-slippers of buttery-yellow compete with swollen cousins whose petals are striped with vinous purple, and whose enormous rounded bag is of richest crimson maroon. One winds upwards

thence into the alpine woodland, deep between vast pinnacled mountains of limestone, mere prickles on the flanks of the Min S'an ridge, but clothed with cool forest in a fashion very heartening after the drought and torridness of the valley regions and the lower gorges. The path, almost unguessable now, wanders through the woodland in the shade, in and out of the stream-bed. Beneath the shade of the trees, in the solemn stillness, the Wood-nymph Primula recurs, amid strange Solomon's seals, and Arums with fantastic tails and spotted evil faces. And finally the so-called "pass" develops into a mere labyrinth of perfectly impossible bare precipices and cañons, in which it goes lost immediately into the bulk of the main ridge, in wall over dark wall of precipices, blackening the twilight of the chines so deep in their heart. In the vast profound darkness of the ravines the Wood-nymph luxuriates in the shingle slopes, like the nettles under the converging precipices of Trow Ghyll; and on the sheer walls hang down the luminous blue flares of the Grand-Violet, while the Harebell Poppy* has a colony of exiled tufts down below at the entrance to the last gully of all, in an opener, sunny place where two trickles meet.

But vainly we toiled and scrambled after fresh results; each effort led to an impasse of sheer cliff over cliff until lost to sight in the impending wall-front of the mountain. Deep and wild are the corrugations into which the Ridge is here torn, and after desperate ascents and descents each combe soon ends blank beneath a precipice afloat with the Fairy Bell and Isopyrum. Yet another possible mode of ascent we tried, indeed, up a gully deep and dark as the Gorges de Trient, beneath the overhanging walls. But even this dank re-echoing

* *M. quintuplinervia*, F. 118.



ISOPYRUM FARRERI, SP. NOVA

cavern of gloom concluded abruptly round the corner in a sheer cascade with no water in it, but a huge boulder blocking its lip, and forbidding access to the yet narrower, gloomier chink that was visible above. A pole, pale with the washing of many seasons' rains, slanted up against this boulder from below, looking like any casual wreckage of a pine-trunk lodged there by the flood. But dim marks upon it showed that this was a ladder put there to help the huntsmen up into the higher ghylls. However, though we sent the Go-go scrambling up it barefooted like a struggling monkey, he reported that the upper channel was no less precipitous and difficult than the lower, and offered no way to the alps above. So that our day concluded there, memorable chiefly for our first sight of the prickly Celestial Poppy (*Meconopsis Prattii*) in one strayed specimen from the shingles of the beck.

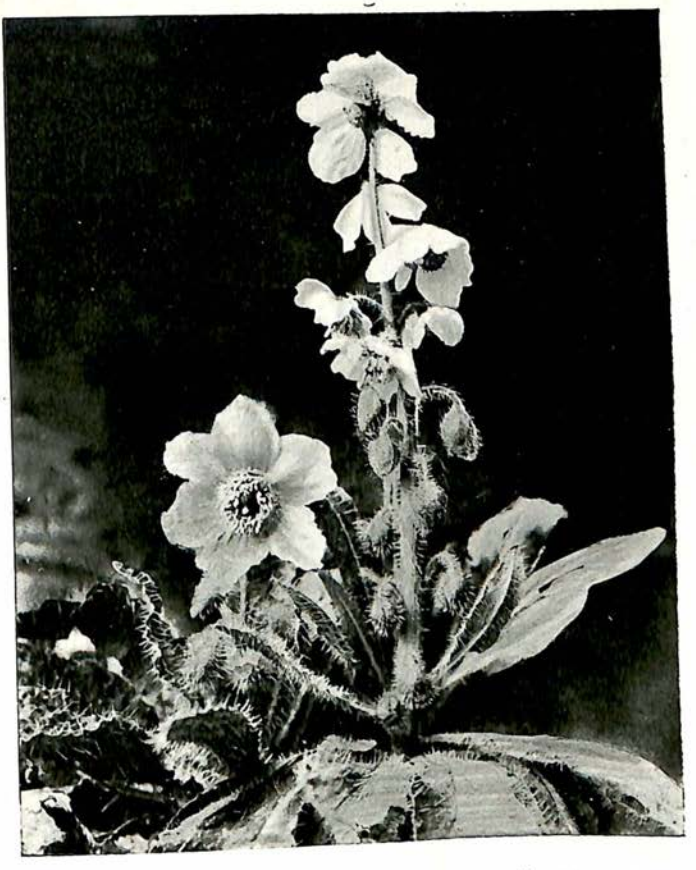
The right-hand one of the two Great Gorges is very much finer than its rival, opener and grander, clothed in scrub, not forest. It was a few days later that we attempted it, and found good omens for our ascent of the ridge in meeting a bridal procession coming through the north gate of Siku as we rode out. The face of the bride was concealed from view, but her many-pleated skirts of phillimot silk were embroidered in sprigs of little scattered flowers with a richness of effect that one had not looked for in a place where sackcloth and plainest blue linen in a thousand patches seem the invariably fashionable wear. Up into the defile we proceeded, and coiled to the right from the divergence up climb over climb in a long succession of winding bays deep beneath the cliffs. The track, in this case, ascends more easily and higher, through similar successive dells of flowering jungle, with lead-blue Jacob's ladders in the lush under-

scrub amid swathes of golden Day-Lilies; and the stately sapphire spires of Delphinium dominate the tangle. From the walls of the precipice flaunts *Primula Lichiangensis*, and the chaos of the boulder-bed has long been veiled by the kindly creeping carpet of *Cotoneaster Dammeri*,* that ramps and roots as it goes in the white silt like any carpeting little willow, till all the roughnesses of bank and blocks are closely covered in a sheet of glossy emerald foliage, amid which, in due time, after the white stars of the blossom are gone, shines out a multitude of brilliant scarlet berries.

Suddenly the gorge ceases, brought up abruptly against a huge steep breast of bamboo scrub, ascending to plumy precipices and pinnacles far overhead. Here a lateral glen curls to the right, and serpentines arduously upward through ever-narrowing ravines, where lilacs tower in faint clouds of blossom, and the crimson Cypripedium lurks. But this track has no long course, and soon enters its final gorge, deep in the heart of the precipice, with the Grand-Violet flopping from the walls. Here it was, on the cooler, shadier aspects of the immortally cool and shady gully, as I scrambled along the banks and ledges of the cliffs, amid tussocks of scant grass and small Rhododendrons occupying the moist banks of humus, that I grew aware of a new Cypripedium.† Here and there she arose amid the herbage, a small delicate person, recalling the Lady's-slipper of the alps, but far more graceful and slight in habit, with elvish pointed segments, quaintly twisted, of greenery-yallery tone, striped with solid lines of maroon. Her lip, however, was her outstanding beauty, being of a pale and waxy cream-yellow outside, and

* Var. *radicans*, F. 148.

† *C. Farreri*, sp. *nova*.



Meconopsis Prattii. The Celestial Poppy

striped internally with maroon that faintly transpired. It was of the strangest bottle shape, too, constricted below the mouth, which expanded again in a row of regular vandykes so hard and glossy as to glitter to the light. Hardly had I gathered my specimens of this than I heard footsteps and voices far above me re-echoing in the gloom of the *Schlucht*. In such a wild fastness, and in such a wild time, these could by no possibility belong to people of good intent. Without doubt here at last were the Wolves or Tibetans with which the fears of Mr. Pung had peopled the high gorges of the Ridge. Being alone and unarmed, I bided my time upon my ledge, and scientifically sought covert in a Rhododendron half a foot high, waiting to see what should emerge from that impregnable and sombre ravine. What did emerge, in due time, were two woodcutters and a cheerful aged woman, propelling peeled trunks down from cascade to cascade of the chine with vast re-echoing clatter. We exchanged the time of day and each other's purposes, and then I was at leisure to wonder where on earth might be those beds of lily of the valley that were filling my nose with a scent of home. Vainly I pried around in hope of this old friend, till at last I became aware that the fragrance was the breath of my own Cypripedium in my own hand.

These gorges, indeed, are happy homes for Lady's-slippers. Return with me now down into the main glen, and let us breast the long steep ascent of shingle and pebbles through the coppice of bamboo clumps towards the col, high above, at the foot of the cliff. Slowly we go, with frequent enthusiasms for pausing to look back at the fantastic pinnacled wildness of the view behind, with one coppiced peak standing close

at hand as sheer as anything in a Chinese picture, and now all a haze of lilac. At last you near the pass, and immediately in the open, warm places of the rough turf, here and there among the jungles of the bamboo, rise sturdy, wide colonies of the Yellow Slipper, handsome with their ample foliage, over which stand proudly the butter-coloured Calceolareous blooms, often with the staminode of dark chocolate, which gives them the handsomest and haughtiest dark-eyed look, till, from having wanted to call the plant Black-eyed Susan, I found that she irresistibly imposed herself on me as Proud Margaret.* Proud Margaret is, indeed, a splendid addition to our Slippers, and exactly repeats in softest citron the round-faced, comfortable loveliness of that white and rosy beauty so well known to all gardeners under either of its two false names, *C. reginæ* or *C. spectabile.*

Proud Margaret haunts the whole Tibetan March, and loves the opener slopes of the lower alpine zone here and there amid bracken and scrub in the barer patches of loam. Sometimes you find her in the woodland, but not so commonly; and opposite Satanee, on one burnt flank of a hill, she was sprouting abundantly in the loose, incinerated soil amid a profusion such as I have never seen of the lush, crimson-bagged Slipper which I am incredibly told is the squatting and toad-like *C. tibeticum*, here transformed to one of the amplest and stateliest and most magnificent of the race, passing out of flower just when Proud Margaret is beginning to colour her buds, and having twice the volume and development of the truer *C. tibeticum* of the Thunder-crown gorges, which is a slenderer, smaller thing altogether, with even larger and more profoundly roundly

* *C. luteum.*

maroon-crimson slippers, rising higher above the much scantier rarer foliage on a much longer naked stretch of scape. There is yet another cousin, too, of Proud Margaret, occurring rarely in the gorges of Thundercrown. But this is but a very poor little humble cousin of the proud lady, in and out among whose stout stems it wanders, ramifying through the mosses, a tight, quite dwarf little thing, with a pair of leaves and then a tiny greenish flower that never opens out properly from the curious golden-yellow lip that is hard and glossy as wax, and so grotesque with warts and whelks and bubukles that it could only make one think of Bardolph's nose, and has accordingly been received by the learned world as *C. Bardolphianum*, sp. *nova*, though its odour is sweeter than I should imagine that of the swashbuckler to have been, having all the heavy, sticky, exotic aromaticness of the Catasetums which its exotic-looking little flowers so much suggest.

From the crest of the rise it looks as if now the way lay comfortably along among the bamboo coppices under the cliffs on your right, and so up to the final ascents of lawn towards the turfy alpine summits of the Ridge that here come hopefully into sight, though still far away above the last dark trees of the dwindling woodland dotted on the huge slopes. Not a bit of it. The only way is to descend right down again into a deep wooded valley on your left, and so continue up a dry stream-bed densely embedded in coppice of bamboo and the straggly purple Rhododendron and a new Dipelta—a magnificent big shrub, but lacking the incomparable elegance and flower-burdened beauty of its predecessor, being rather stiff and gawky in habit, with larger flowers, indeed, but not quite so abundant, and of a warmer pink, more obvious and less elfin than

the pearly pallors of *D. elegans*, which has long since been spreading the wide, chaffy wings of its seed by the time that its successor is unfolding in early July. At last the stream-bed enters the flank of the fell and becomes an impassable ravine, from which you have to diverge to the left, up yet another stiff pull, at first through bamboo scrub, and then up a long climb through grasses that shelter the butterfly Iris among the rosy Peonies. Immediately opposite, too, you see the fearsome walls of the ravine from which you have diverged crested by splendid forests flowing down from above in the finest sweep of woodland that I know in the Thundercrown convolutions, and the only one that shows you the Red Birch in full development of its filmy, emerald loveliness amid the sombre stature of the firs.

And here as we sat and rested, we became aware of a note of new yellow occurring on the face of that rosy limestone precipice opposite. Quickly out with the field-glasses that are so essential in alpine exploration, and so incalculable a saving of time and energy in a country so vast that both should be sedulously economised. Yes; it is the Citron Primrose* hanging in masses from the ledges and grottoes of the precipice, and shaking out its ample heads of purest, soft, canary-yellow in scorn at its worshippers peering helplessly up from the foot of the cliff. Never, except in the very highest alpine crannies of all, will you find *P. citrina* growing in any open or easy situation; and in its highest alpine stations it is dwarfed and tight and poor, and even then still hugs the shadier, cooler, and more over-

* *Primula citrina;* including, I believe, as a xeromorph, rare and poor, from the bleak Alps of the Upper Hwang Hor, Przewalsky's *P. flava*, represented only by a sheet of four wretched specimens and one good one, in the Petrograd Herbarium.

PRIMULA CITRINA

hanging line of the cliffs, making a lovely picture when its gentle Oxlips alternate along the crannies with the skim-milk Anemones of the Isopyrum.

But of very different calibre is *P. citrina* when happily at home in the places she affects. For never will you see this noble person except in caves and overhung hollows in the face of limestone precipices as stark and sheer as those whose similar crannies give delight to *P. Allionii* and *P. sinensis*. But *P. Allionii* has no scruple in confronting rain and sun and shine; *P. citrina* haunts only those hollows where neither sun nor shower can ever penetrate, and there she luxuriates in the damp silt that has accumulated through many ages, forming big lush masses of clumps with limp, loose, thin-textured leaves, of a light dull green on the upper surface, and beneath, like all the stalks, ghostly in a solid vesture of snow-white meal. The whole plant has a curiously soft, half-hardy, exotic look, suggesting the remote Abyssinian cousins with whom it has nothing whatever to do. And it even recalls them in the tone of its flowers, of so bland and sweet a citron, clean, melting, and tender in tone as the Milan-soufflé loveliness of *P. sikkimensis*.

But the Ridge is still far, and very high above. Not yet is the moment for attempting to take *P. citrina* by storm. We continue along under the jut of a precipice, where the Fairy Bell swings out its ghostly chimes of blown glass amid the crumpled rosy flares of Incarvillea, and the dark crimson Slipper occasionally squats in the ledges, deluding you with the notion of a strayed Peony from the wide drifts as sweet as roses that fill the stony, grassy places as you emerge at last from the belt of bamboos round under the rock. After which you find yourself in the woodland glade immediately at the base

of the long, long final climb to the Great Ridge itself, between which and you no more obstacles now intervene. Up you go, and up and up. Soon the last dwindling woodland fades away, and you find yourself out on the open slope of steep and stony turf, where still tower the lingering huge globes of the Lampshade Poppy amid the lovelier, smaller, hovering butterflies of the Harebell Poppy. Up and up and up. Now the world unfolds behind you, and far out above the insignificant-looking ravines and corrugations of the gorges at your feet, you gaze right back over the ranges to the long line of the Satanee Alps.

But the chief diversion of that ascent was afforded by the Grand-Violet. For high on the right stood out a little neck of moorland, tight with tiny willows and Rhododendrons matted over the mossy ground, facing west beneath a mighty peak of precipice. A dim colour showed here as we mounted, and we scrambled up the shelving, cool ledges of the cliff below and along its face to see what might be shimmering so softly blue along that little spur. And it was the Grand-Violet, in abundance as I have never seen it before or since; and in the open moorland, too, turning the Rhododendron drift to a galaxy of purple sparks, springing everywhere from the moss, and surging happily above the minute scrub, and lodging in orderly rows along the lower reaches of the cliff, aligned beneath the shadow of every step of the shelving face in a rich, cool, red loam, very heavy and clammy and sticky. So one could get the plant's character more completely than before, and the curious structure of its flowers, usually with five lobes, but often with six, seven, or even eight.

In all the cooler westerly frontages of the gullies from that spur it now glowed more or less abundant as we

mounted, though never with quite the lavish glory it had shown on its first outburst. But the toils of the ascent soon restrained all our energy to the search for something new. We reached the summit of the climb at last, and found ourselves on an arête leading straight up to the ridge on our right, though broken with cliffs and outcrops of rock on which the snowy Anemone was now becoming rare and poor. It was still too early for the fine high alpine lawn of the arête itself, though my eyes were glad to meet a very old friend in *Androsace chamæjasme*. Here, however, the Ground-Jasmine is by no means so notable a beauty as where she rambles through the turf of the Bernese Oberland; and only glints in tiny, rare, white pearls of blossom scattered peering like wee, golden-eyed, white forget-me-nots, amid the sere pale turf, in which the other alpine flowers were but just beginning to unfold from their sleep. The last two or three hundred feet of the climb is over a chaos of fine, red, shaly shingle in which the chief inhabitant is the Celestial Poppy, whose heavenly loveliness was, however, still far down in the bud at that time; nor could anything be made of the rich green hassocks that dotted the stone-slope in mounded masses of darkness over the russet shales. I diagnosed a Potentilla, but could do no more; and so continued the final ascent, finding for this nameless eminence of the great Min S'an Ridge only the unpatriotic designation of the Roterdspitze, after that russet neck which ties the Schlern at right angles to the Rosengarten chain. The only sign of life here was the Rock-nymph, as happy as a bird in all the crannies, staring with its little ample faces of inexpressibly cheering effect on that gaunt and lifeless peak, though far from the stall-fed magnificence it attains in the cosy damp darkness of the Bastion

gorge. As for the prospect, I shall leave it to burst on you from the summit of Thundercrown, which now seems to loom higher and more splendid than ever, about two miles away along the arête of which it is the culminating excrescence.

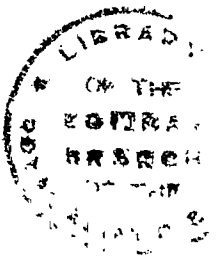
As with so many important mountains, the greater the altitude from which you see it the more enormous appears its bulk and height. From here you can gain some faint notion of the scale on which these alps are built, when you see the small ruts and wrinkles, clothed in dim dark fur of woodland, that sink away earthwards in deep but undistinguishable crumplings towards Siku, just visible from the actual peak of the Roterdspitze like something seen from a balloon. For these are the Great Gorges and their affluents, now the merest incidents in the gigantic riven flanks of Thundercrown, sweeping up in lawn over lawn between the precipices to the tumultuous architecture of the summit. And in having so splendid a spectacle on the one hand (while on the other stretch away eastward the lesser eminences of the Great Ridge which concludes the Min S'an) the Roterdspitze is superior as a view-point to the Crown of Thunders itself, supreme monarch of everything it surveys.

Cold clouds, however, came up that day and jealously swallowed up the depths and the distances from sight; so down from that high point we raced, into the upper gullies of the gorges, for our work among the two Primulas, Citrina in her impregnable grottos and the Grand-Violet along her ledges. And so down into the profundities, whence the Mee, in terror of the now rapidly darkening thunders, so violently hurried the white pony over the rough boulder-track that it subsequently took ill for many days to come—poor patient willing beast.

THUNDERCROWN, FROM THE ROTERDSPITZE

But he could not outrace the anger of the affronted spirits. At dusk, in the premature darkness of the ravine, the blackened heavens broke in fire and thunder and deluges of rain, and the walls of the gorges roared and echoed and rumbled round till it seemed as if the mountain had found voice to blare its disapproval of intrusions. It was deep night before we came at last to Siku, overtaking our carriers in the pitchy murk paddling delicately like ducks in the slithery mud of the paths, and one of them, bearing the rifle, having been arrested and beaten by one of the soldiers on suspicion of being a brigand.

END OF VOL. I.



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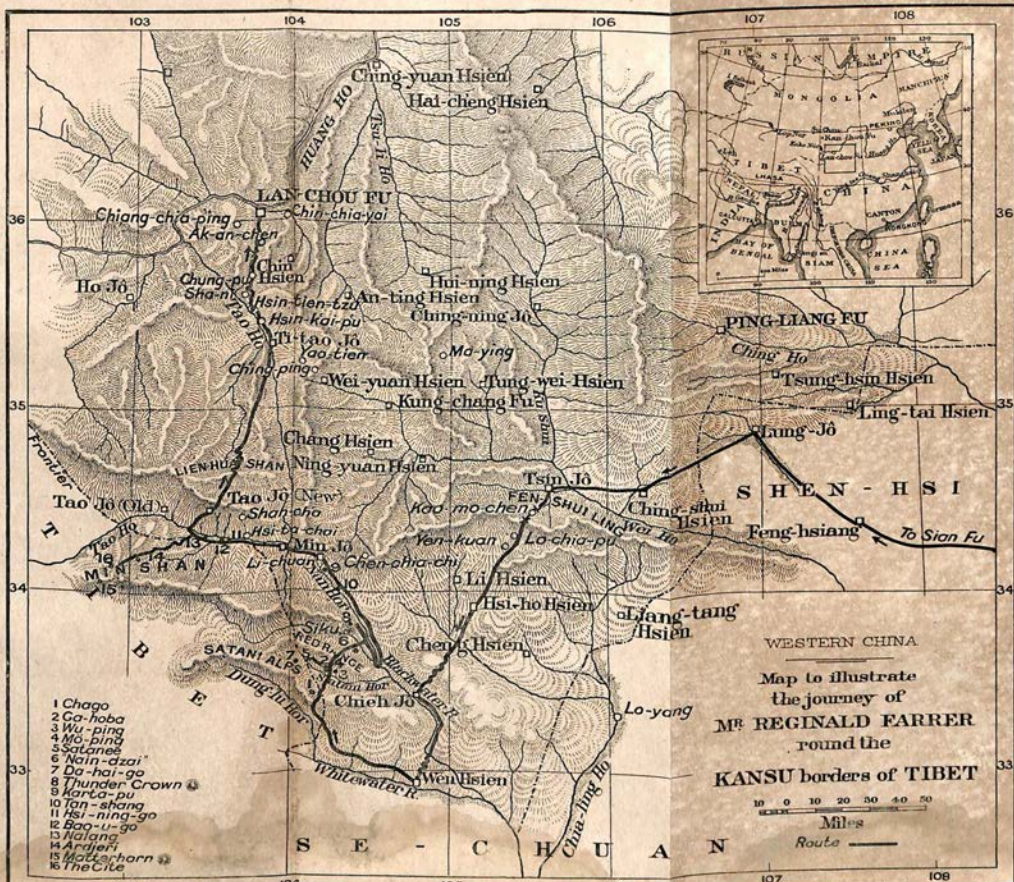

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